

2010 International

BRITISH PIKE SQUAD



Gutted – absolutely gutted! That was the feeling within the British camp after being trounced by the Irish at the International Pike Championship's held between the two nations at Ballaghadereen in County Roscommon over the weekend of the 2nd / 3rd of October. And it had started all so well for the Brits as well.....

With the British squad making their way to Ireland via ferry and air, we had all arranged to meet at the Abbeyfield

Hotel on the Wednesday. By early afternoon we were all ensconced safely within our rooms, and enjoying either cups of coffee or that most famous of brews "Guinness". It was a total pleasure to look outside and see bright sunshine and dry skies with more good weather to follow. A massive change for us after our last two trips to the Emerald shore. Would this change of luck in weather conditions bode well for the fishing?

Thursday and Friday were to be our practice days on the River Suck at Athleague and the deep water section at Dunamon. These two days produced a fair number of fish to those prepared to work hard and go in search of their prey.

The pike however were in a finicky mood, with bites un-usually tentative instead of the usual rod thumping takes of normal that we expect when fishing wobbled dead-baits or lures. The river was well within its banks, and was carrying just the slightest tinge of colour – perfect conditions for pike fishing.

The pike however were in a finicky mood, with bites un-usually tentative instead of the usual rod thumping takes of normal that we expect when fishing wobbled dead-baits or lures. The river was well within its banks, and was carrying just the slightest tinge of colour – perfect conditions for pike fishing.

Andy Waller and Paul Danby were busy trying out some rigs using a Partridge VB double hook at the front with a treble down the flank of the bait (a rig that was much used by members of the BPS many years ago) and were fairly confident that this rig would give them a valuable addition to their match armoury. A few others were trying out some of the Sebile Magic Swim Soft-bait lures that we had also been given to try, and Alan Grant in particular was very impressed with how he was able to work these single hook lures through and over the top of the beds of lily pads, bringing up pike from deep within their root systems. These lures also might well have a part to play in the coming few days of the International. All in all, most members of the BPS managed a few fish over the two practice days. Most were around the 2lb mark, and fell for wobbled baits, lures or static float tactics. This was somewhat worrying for us as we had expected at least a smattering of better quality fish to fall to our rods.

Highlight of the practice days for the British was that for once Peter Timmis (aka 'Soggy') had not fallen in, but Alan Grant had! Alan took his trousers off to dry them on the fence on the stands at Dunamon and almost managed to shock Louise with the sight of his bare legs and underpants. Great laughter ensued, especially in the bar afterwards when we transferred the photos from members cameras onto my net-book for all to see.

The evening before the big day saw both squads enjoying the usual good humoured craic' that has grown up between the two nations since the inception of the International back in 1992. The Guinness was flowing and banter was being shared amongst friends old and new over the extremely good choice of food on offer at the hotel. (One thing for certain was that no-one wanted to go

outside of the hotel for their food, with such a great menu available right there). It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of those fishing the following day decided that sleep was more important to them than that extra pint of the 'Black Stuff'. Mind you, there were one or two of the stewards looking a bit bleary eyed at breakfast the following morning!

The briefing during the evening saw us receive the news that Saturday's leg of the match would be fished on the River Suck at and around Glinsk, an area we had previously fished in 2002. This river has a history of producing some superb catches of pike from its length; with some real leviathans lurking in its depths. Better news was that as the rain had held off for so long, Sunday's leg would also be fished on the Suck, but on a stretch further up the river. We would not be told exactly where we were fishing until the morning, leaving us no chance at all of researching out any info on the water. That did worry us as it gave the Irish what we felt was an un-fair advantage.

Saturday saw us wake to dry conditions with scattered clouds scudding across the sky. Weather reports suggested the chance of a few very light showers, with moderate winds having switched from a cold Easterly to a warmer South-westerly during the day. Thoughts of both teams were of a good days sport ahead of us. Parking up on the bog road, a mix of British and Irish set off along the river bank immediately in front of the parked up vehicles, whilst others opted for a long forced walk along the road to reach a section below a farm track a good 1 ½ miles away before fishing. It was here that I saw Andy Waller latch into a small jack of 2½ lbs on just his second cast to some mid-river reeds. A matter of minutes later I weighed in another jack of 2lbs 10ozs caught by Irish angler Jodie Kiernan from right in front of me. The match was up and running!

With a small foot-bridge leading across only half way across the river, both British & Irish anglers were forced to wade across the deeper water on the far side to get to the reeds on the far bank. It was hysterical to watch anglers from both sides giving piggy-backs to their fellow competitors and stewards to get across the deep water, especially when Adam Holmes dumped his passenger into the river for a soaking. That picture was one that escaped us, but Pat Sheenan managed to click away with his camera as further anglers made subsequent trips across the river.

As Adam and Andy were working their way back along the reeds towards me, I was able to see Andy latch into a small jack, followed almost immediately by Adam landing his first fish of the day. This was followed shortly after by a really small fish of about 8ozs.

News started to filter through over the phone of a few more fish being caught elsewhere on the river, with Wayne Gorringe having landed 3 small jacks, and that Alan Grant had had a better fish of about 8lbs along with a small jack. Further news also came through that one or two of the Irish had also managed a fish or two. Alan Grant & Mark Lloyd had been working their way along the bank towards me, and almost immediately on reaching the swims in front of me Mark hit into a fish of 2lbs 01ozs that smashed into his bait as it was being twitched across the surface. This was carefully played to the bank before being expertly netted by Mark's Steward.

Reports had been filtering through for a while that Paul Danby was amassing a weight of fish along the river, and the Irish were desperate to get an Irish angler up close to him, whilst Irish angler Jodie Kiernan was doing an erstwhile job of catching a number of pike from another section of the river.

Very few other reports were coming through to me, but it seemed certain that Team GB were slightly in the lead, and as soon as the match was over and on meeting up in the parking area for the traditional barbecue as arranged and cooked by Pat Sheenan, it was becoming apparent that we had indeed put together a slender lead over our Irish Hosts. This was confirmed as soon as we got back to the Hotel, where once all figures had been tallied from both the competitor's and stewards weigh cards we found we had a lead of almost 23lbs. A total of 96 pike had been caught by both sides, with Team GB landing 56 to the 40 by the Irish.

There was a great deal of laughter in the bar during the evening, especially when talk turned to the facts that both John Currie & Pat Behan had hit their heads on the electric fence running close to the river at one end of the match stretch. Joking aside, both squads knew that 23lbs was not a lot of weight and that it was all to fish for on the morrow. The other butt of the evenings jokes was poor Stu Parker who had tripped on some wire and then swan dived down a 10ft bank into 2ft of water; soaking himself in the process whilst giving everyone else a real hoot.

With a real buzz in the air the following morning, the two sides set off for another stretch of the river Suck around Ballyforan, where the squads would have the choice of two starting points some few miles apart. With both squads expecting to split up roughly 50/50, I was amazed to find at the start of the match that we had 5 of the British squad and just 3 Irish anglers at this end of the venue. With the bulk of their squad up the river and outnumbering our boys and gal by 7 to 5, had we made a mistake in having so many of our boys at this end of the

stretch, or had they? Time would tell.

Paul Danby on the far bank across from me was soon into action with a small jack of 5ozs, followed a short while later by another of 2 ½lbs. Wading under the road bridge he was working his bait in between and around the reeds in the middle of the river when watching the the bridge parapet I actually saw a 5lb pike come out from its hidey-hole and nail his bait. After a spirited fight she was in the bag, weighed, and returned to the water by Paul's Irish steward. By then all of the other British anglers that had been with Paul had worked their way up the river to a wooded section in the distance, and Paul set off in pursuit of them whilst working through all available features.

Sitting in the car park talking to Alistair Rawlings who was along to cover the event for the Pike & Predators magazine, it was mentioned that this bridge area often provided pike up to about 14lbs in weight, but little else on this part of the water until some ¼ mile down the river. where it deepened. The upper parts that our boys were now fishing held a good number of pike to some size until the shallows where there was an artificial dam protruding out into the river; controlling the rivers flow. After this area there was an area of deeper water where shoals of roach are often found; with pike not far away from such a ready food source. With the Irish affinity to wind ups and creation of rumours, it was not long before calls were coming in of anglers picking up large bags of fish from other parts of the river. Some we accepted straight away, whilst others were treated as spurious until proven. News was also slowly filtering through that Andy Waller was not having a good day, losing fish – including a very large double. (Andy had reverted to his normal match rigs, but for some reason kept bumping off the fish. Perhaps this was down to the finicky way they were grabbing the baits?).

Pat Sheenan had driven back to the car park where I was, and with no anglers in sight we headed up river to a spot where we could intercept the 5 British boys making their way up towards the dam. Only 5 minutes after we got there we met up with Andy & Paul. Both had caught a few pike, but Andy was fuming as he had lost 8 fish including the large double, and his confidence was at an all time low. All of the boys had managed to turn plenty of pike, but as they were in a finicky mood had only managed to actually tempt just a few into taking their baits and then onto the bank to be weighed and returned.

By now reports were coming in thick and fast from the number of British stewards accompanying the Irish that it was clear that not only had our lead disappeared, but the Irish were taking us apart on the upper reaches of the river. Jodie Kiernan, Paul Reynolds, Psul O'Donohoe & Ray Keyes were n particular were putting together bumper bags of fish, taking away any chance of us getting our hands on the trophy we so earnestly wanted to win. Only Adam Holmes for the British was putting together a comparative bag of fish.

It did not look any better at the car park after the match as Pat prepared the barbecue. I was sat at a bench adding in all the weights from the competitors as they came in on my trusty net-book; and it was more and more apparent that as each weight was added to the sheet that we were heading for a trouncing. When the last of the weigh cards were added to the weigh sheet, it was all there for all to see that Ireland had won by 61lbs 01ozs. They had amassed an overall total of 100 pike for 303lbs 03ozs to the 93 pike for 243lbs 02ozs caught by Great Britain. Incredibly too, their average weight of fish was better that Great Britain's. Normally we catch fewer fish, but usually the better quality stamp of fish. This time round they did us on both!

A somewhat subdued group of British anglers returned to our hotel for a quick shower and brush up before the presentation dinner planned for 8.30pm. Downstairs in the bar the Irish were in jubilant mood, and despite our losing; both squads were enjoying the banter of the night before.

After a great dinner, we were treated to the usual after-dinner speeches from John Chambers as Chairman of the Irish Federation and me as Team Manager of the BPS. Wayne also said a short thank you to all the stewards who had come along to support both squads, raising his glass to one and all for their incredible support in making the International work as smoothly as it had done. Fitting in a way as this was Wayne's last International as issues with health and home will see him taking a break from the BPS. Hopefully he will return to our folds in the future?

The "Kevin D'Arcy Memorial Trophy" for the overall top angler of the two days of hard fought competition was awarded to Jodie Kiernan who had landed a total of 21 pike for a total weight of 53lbs 10ozs – a fitting winner and weight of fish to receive this prestigious shield. Jodie was also presented with a rod by our Irish hosts for his sterling effort. Another rod was presented to Eugene McCabe for the largest pike of the weekend, a pike of 11lbs 11ozs proving the best landed over the two days, though much larger fish were hooked and lost. The best of the British anglers were Paul Danby who landed 16 fish for 47lbs 06ozs and Adam Holmes who also had 16 fish, but for only 36lbs 11ozs.

Yes we were upset, upset especially for Wayne and Louise. Wayne as he was leaving us, and for Louise; who as only the second woman to take part in this event would not be taking home that Gold medal she so wanted

(Suzanne Waller being the first woman to represent Great Britain back in 2004). But at the end of the day, we had been beaten by an Irish squad that knew the water well, with local knowledge playing a massive part in the outcome. None of the British anglers had ever fished on that part of the river, and therefore with no research available to us we had no real chance of preventing the Irish from obtaining the final result.

The really good thing for me throughout the International this year was seeing just how well we had 'Gelled' as a team. Great Spirit and the determination to work together; sharing of tackle and tactics together to help everyone out as best they could. Our stewards also played an incredible part, supporting the team when they could and shadowing the Irish anglers. Assisting them whenever they could with netting of the fish, and even lighting their cigarettes for them! More than one competitor remarked on how helpful the British guys and gals were. The same went for the Irish stewards who looked after all of our competitors – there can never be enough thanks said for their support of us.

We cannot also leave out the support given to us by our sponsors, C&M Rapid Eyewear Ltd, who supplied the entire squad and two reserves with a pair of their excellent Catch-Pro sunglasses. Bass Lures UK who provided us with a load of lures for the raffle as well as packs of the simply superb Sebile Magic Swim Soft-bait lures to try out. Really fantastic action lures that will be added to our bags in the future as another of the must have items in our bags. Lastly but not least I would like to thank Baits Direct for sorting out our baits for us and ensuring their delivery to us in Ireland. The baits were in first rate condition when we received them – still frozen and placed straight into the freezer the hotel had made available for us.

I cannot fail to thank the hotel itself, for their fantastic service, great food, and for all those other little bits they did to make us feel like the most welcome of guests; most of it far beyond anything that could be expected at any hotel we have ever stayed in before. We weren't just guests, we were friends and family! If anyone reading this ever wants to stay in a great hotel, with great food and fantastic facilities; then just head over to Ballaghaderreen and the Abbeyfield Hotel will look after you really well. The food was exceptionally good, with large comfortable rooms and a sauna and gym. Godfery & Rory who sorted out all the arrangements for the International had a room the size of a small conference centre; with a floor level Jacuzzi! Lucky so and so's!

Next year will see us stage the International on British soil. Where we are going, well that's a secret for now. What I can say, is that it will have a good head of pike in the waters, and that the craic' will be as great as ever. Roll on October 2011.

Mike Skipper

IRELAND	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	OVERALL	FISH
Eugene McCabe	17.10	15.02	32.12	11
Jimmy Thompson	7.14	10.05	18.03	7
Robbie McShane	10.04	5.15	16.03	8
Paul Reynolds	12.04	38.04	50.08	15
Ray Keyes	6.09	28.05	34.14	7
Larry Mulvaney	13.03	0	13.03	2
Jodie Kiernan	15.11	37.15	53.10	21
Pat Behan	6.12	11.11	18.07	6
Paul O'Donohoe	16.12	27.01	43.13	15
Mickey Doherty	9.15	3.12	22.10	8
Grand Total	116.14	187.05	303.03	100
GREAT BRITAIN	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	OVERALL	FISH
Mark Lloyd	8.00	4.10	12.10	6
Wayne Goringe	13.15	8.04	22.03	13
Gary Edwards	11.11	16.09	28.04	11
Darren Knowles	7.02	13.07	20.09	7
Adam Holmes	10.01	26.12	36.13	16
Andy Waller	20.07	9.15	30.06	9
John Currie	15.11	2.12	18.07	6
Louise Hunns	2.05	10.02	12.07	5
Paul Danby	38.11	8.11	47.06	16
Alan Grant	11.11	2.06	14.01	4
Grand Total	139.10	103.08	243.02	93