

Why do we go pike fishing?

BRITISH PIKE SQUAD

Deep in the fens, the British Pike Squad are in training, Chris Bishop finds them burning shoe leather and throwing a 'wobbler'. Wayne Gorringe flicks a smelt across the drain and watches intently as it slowly sinks out of sight. "They take on the drop when they're up for it, or you land it on one's nose," he says. "Sometimes they just roar off with it, other times you'll just get see the line twitch. You've got to concentrate all the time, it's quite a demanding way of fishing." Nothing fancied the six inch smellie on a pair of doubles this time, so Wayne snaps the bail arm shut and brings it to life with a few turns of the reel handle and flicks of the rod. Three or four casts and he's got itch feet. Wobblers don't hang around, his mates Stuart Parker and Louise Hunns are several swims away already. It doesn't take long before the inevitable happens. As Wayne's smelt jinks and dances back towards us, a pike around the 3 pound mark decides it takes two to tango and gets more than it bargained for as it flashes out of the near-side lilies.



It's on the bank in what seems like seconds later, netted, unhooked with a snick of the pliers and back in the water again. I check the pictures right Scrolling through the images on the camera. When I look up Wayne and his fellow 'squaddies' Stuart and Louise are already on their toes. Wobblers are big on mobile. Covering the maximum amount of water is their MO. "People call it sink and draw, but we're twitching the baits back all the time which is why we call it the 'wobble'" said Wayne. They learned it all the hard way.

The first British Squad was formed by the then East Sussex PAC LO Chris Tingley and his brother Dave, from the top 10 anglers in the 1991 ACA/Angling Times Pike Championship's. The Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs threw down the gauntlet and suggested an annual two day contest, alternating between Ireland and England.

One day would be a sit-down, two-rod match. The other a one-rod rover. Hopes were high when the British set off in May 1992, to face the Irish at Mullingar. They found themselves faced with a large reed fringed lough, on which fish able water could only be reached by wading. With no one in the British squad having thigh, let alone chest waders, the entire party including stewards were soon soaked through. Dunkirk spirit prevailed, the Brit's, rolled their trousers up and piled in anyway and even managed to achieve a slight lead over their hosts.

But Irish eyes well and truly smiled the next day, as the lads from the land of the Leprechauns sent Britain packing with their ultra-mobile style of sink and draw fishing dead baits, the 'wobble', as they called it. Since then the BPS has focused on mastering a method so at odds with how most of us now pike fish.

Bait anglers are so weighed down with so much gear it's a struggle to rod hop to the next swim, let alone cover two miles of drain. Wobblers travel light. Tackle needed is minimal, just spare traces, swan shots and a few other bits and pieces, all of which fit in their pockets. Other bits and bobs include the time honoured fishing Gazette pike bung which can be clipped on the line to fish static for a few minutes if a following fish seems reluctant to take or you fancy a quick sit-down and a cuppa.

Just about everything goes in a sleeveless vest with pockets everywhere. Weigh sling, scales and a few other creature comforts go in a small shoulder bag. Peaked cap and Polaroid's help with spotting a following fish. Last but not least, a folding landing net is hooked into the back of the vest. Stuart feels a pluck and opens his bail arm to give the fish a foot or two of slack, as he flicks the net off his back and flips it open before he winds down and pulls into a scraper double. All this happens in approximately half the time it takes to read this paragraph. Squaddie's only give a taking fish a second or two before they nail them. "Some people let them run off a bit further, but we reckon the time it takes to get the net ready's just right" he said. Years of practice and Team G.B are a match for the best of 'em at this.



For best of 'em, read the Irish Pike Squad, who were the best wobblers in the business when the gauntlet was first thrown down.

Delicate weighting can alter the way the bait behaves on the retrieve. A single swan shot makes a roach or smelt dive enticingly towards the bottom., while slightly more weight might be needed in flowing water. Some squaddie's carry a few favourite lures, particularly

rubber shads, but all are confident the wobble will out fish artificial's. This isn't a big fish method. Matches are decided by weights, so the BPS tactic is to try to catch as many pike as possible. What the British Pike Squad is about is quantity not quality." says Wayne, "Everyone is on the move all the time. When people join the team, we explain they've got to fish for the team and keep on the move". Having said this, there have been a few exceptions to the rule, with Stuart in particular taking some cracking fen 20's.

It's not just about the fishing of course. It's the tremendous camaraderie that has grown up between pike anglers from the two nations over the 13 years, not to mention one or two sessions on the black stuff! "Forty fishermen drank a river of beer". The Sun reported one year when the two teams literally drank a hotel dry. As well as boosting International relations and the share price of Guinness, the squad has no bar as far as sex is concerned with Suzanne Waller qualifying to represent her country at a sport which literally has a handful of female participants. Louise is also doing her level best to qualify and soon proves worthy. "Woo Hoo" she whoops, hitting a take as a larger fish surges away, "I thought I felt it last cast. I had a gentle knock". She slugs it out like a prize-fighter as it bow-waves and tail walks in and out of the lilies. I'd let it have it's head if I'd been using size 8 barb-less doubles, but she grins and barely gives an inch. When the live coloured low double is in the net, hook hanging by just a thread in it's scissors. I tell her. "You did well to get that one in gal." "Nah mate," she says, as she turns the hooks out and holds the fish up for a picture. "You've just got to show 'em who's boss."



The pike squad have found their second wind. I've got blisters, back-ache and a two mile walk back to the car. We say our goodbyes, and when I pause a few hundred yards up the bank and look back, they're already three specks in the distance.

This article was written by Chris Bishop, the Press Officer for The Pike Anglers Club of Great Britain and published in the Autumn 2006 issue 113 of Pikelines.