

A MEMORABLE SEASON

Billy Allen

This is the re-telling of a great, from my perspective anyway, cat fishing season; the memories of which will live with me for a very long time. When I first started thinking about writing this piece I was wondering how to do it, as to be honest it's not very often I have too much to write about. I've lost count of the amount of times I've re-written it, it's not a process that comes naturally to me but in the main I have to say I've enjoyed it. I'm still not completely happy with the end result but I hope you enjoy it, if you do then why not have a go at writing an article yourself you might be pleasantly surprised.

Some years ago I got the chance of joining a very special water. It was a place that I was very much aware of but never really thought I'd get through the gates, never mind be able to fish it. However that all changed when a chance remark to an old pike fishing mate of mine started a chain of events that culminated in me being a syndicate member. To cut a very long story short, it transpired that he knew the owner very well indeed and after numerous phone calls and a meeting I stumped up, the not inconsiderable amount and it was not before too long I was driving the short journey to do my first cat session.

It's a lovely 35 acre lake and is predominately a carp syndicate but was stocked with just two catfish a number of years ago, just as a novelty really but fortunately or unfortunately, depending

on your point of view I suppose, they bred and the lake now holds a good head of cats. They get caught from time to time by the carp lads, with fish being reported to 70lb+ but they were never accurately weighed so the true size of these fish was open to debate. Now I'm no carp angler, I'm a dyed in the wool predator man, as well as cats I fish for pike, chub and zander, So it had to be the traditional predator approach for me, I do use dead bait, worms and meat in my catting but I don't think you can beat the thrill of a screaming run when a big predator takes the live bait from under your dumbbell rig. I had managed to obtain permission to use lives and as far as I knew this approach hadn't been tried before, so I was hopeful that it would produce some good fish for me. The only proviso was that I didn't use some of the big roach that inhabit the place. They do grow very big indeed and quite numerous too, in one bait snatching session I had 6 over the magic 2lb mark the biggest going 2lb 8oz cracking roach fishing I'm sure you'll agree but not what I was there for.

Now I've been in carp dominated syndicates before and always felt a bit of a social leper. Upon meeting some of the carping fraternity and explaining to them that I don't carp fish at all and I'm after the cats, they looked at me with, first amazement then disbelief. Some, that had already heard that there's a loony loose on their water just nodded

Stunning looking
catfish - 57 lb 40z





their heads and said "Oh you're the one then". Having said that, most of the lads seemed to be a good bunch and I have made one or two really good friends who I still regularly keep in touch with.

There are one or two things to say before I recount my story. Time is at a premium for me, like most people nowadays trying to balance a busy home, work and leisure environment is not always easy. So most of my cat fishing has to be just quick one nighters, usually at the weekend, the busiest time on the lake, added to this, there's a strict two rod limit, which means I had to use the most effective bait and methods available to me so, not much time for experimentation!

Anyway, enough of my rambling let's get on with it. It was early April which saw my first visit with day temperatures up to 15 degrees C (and sunny) but the nights were still a chilly 3 degrees C, I was thinking it could go either way. I set up in the first likely looking swim not knowing anything at all about the place I had a chuck about for a while plumbing depths and finding a gravel bar not too far out. I then caught a few lives, which I was relieved to find were easy to catch even for me, two rods went out, one dumbbell live the other popped up half roach both in about eight foot of water. I settled back to wait for some action. I had a run on the half roach which was still going

when I hit it, nothing! - but encouraging . The night passed without incident so at first light I changed the dead bait for popped up lobs. I was just packing up at 9.30am when the lobs took off and I had my first cat from a new water, only 8lb but very welcome, it's always great to get your first fish on a new water, I was well chuffed.

I then had a couple of trips, trying various baits, methods and swims having a few runs on all of them, in particular on the lives but no more fish, so I decided to concentrate my efforts on one particular swim which had depths of 10-16 foot just two rod lengths out and even better was on a corner of an island; a natural patrolling area for any cat, plus it was a renowned hard carp swim so most of the membership gave it a wide berth meaning I'd have it myself most of the time. It was now early May when I was setting up in said swim, both rods on lives, one dumbbell the other popped up to mid-water. What a wise move it turned out to be, I had six runs in total landing two nice cats of 16lb and 28lb 8oz. The rest of the month was very frustrating

Top: The carp syndicate lake - 35 acres of it!
Above: Another whacker, this time 67lb 4oz

having nine runs and only a small fish to show for it, they were all screamers too so my only conclusion was they were small kittens just grabbing at the live bait. I arrived on the last weekend in May knowing that I couldn't fish for a few weekends due to family commitments but was encouraged (and a bit miffed) that one of the carp lads had a cat of around 73lb but couldn't be verified as it bottomed out his scales. Baits were caught and put out (both on dumbbells) I sat back to await events, the night passed quietly with only one dropped run but the morning brought a great result, a cracking fish of 40lb 8oz and my first fish in the daylight hours, I had a two day pass from home so unusually for me had a second night to look forward to which provided another nice fish of 24lb.

It was the end of June before I could get back, the weather was spot on 20 degrees, overcast and muggy with rain forecast for the night. Everything sorted it all looked perfect, It just felt right and I was convinced something was going to happen. I'd been laying there for a few hours watching both lives going round and round almost mesmerised by them when I saw one disappear in a vortex. It proved to be only 6lb but was welcome none the less. 35 minutes later another cat was landed at 16lb 8oz, they're getting bigger I thought, never for a minute thinking how much bigger.

I was playing this huge unseen cat, that despite my best efforts just wouldn't come to the net, when I heard what I thought was my alarm clock for work was going off, opening my eyes I realised where I was and scrambled to my rods

and resumed the battle from my dreams, only this time in reality, the fish was the most powerful I've ever encountered going on clutch screaming, unstoppable runs. Eventually, I wore it down and guided it to the net, dropped the rod and scooped it up, for a minute I just stared at it, gob smacked, definitely my biggest cat by a long way. I staggered up the bank with my prize just about getting it off the ground in the sling and on the scales she went 62lb 8oz a new P.B. for me and the biggest and most impressive cat I've seen on the bank, after a few photos the rod was sorted and out again. I then realised I didn't measure the length and girth which is something I do like to do. The rain was still coming down and I was soaked to the skin and covered in slime but I had a huge grin on my face and had never felt so happy, I must have looked like some sort of demented serial killer. I just lay there for a while thinking it doesn't get any better than this, when it did! Another long one tone scream off my alarms and I'm in again, similar sort of battle, similar sort of outcome; another monster in the net 57lb 4oz. What's going on? these sort of things just don't happen to the likes of me but I've got the pics to prove it and the stat's 62" long 30" girth, what a way of ending a session and what a fantastic brace of cat's UNBELIEVABLE.!

The summer hurtled on and I caught more cats, the lake was being really kind to me. The next memorable session was at the end of August with me accounting for another two fish at 28lb and a cracker at 50lb 4oz on a live again but fished two foot under the surface and another

A happy Billy proudly displays a forty pounder



in the middle of the day.

September came and went without much of note happening and I was thinking that I've had a great first year but perhaps it was time to get the pike rods out. Then the weather changed and the temperature soared to 26 degrees so I had to give it one last go, so the first weekend in October saw me on the bank again, damn there was a carper in 'MY' swim, I couldn't believe it, I'd not seen a soul there all season, so I had to fish the opposite corner; not quite so deep at around 10ft max. I had a two night session to look forward to but this was definitely going to be my last chance for the year. First night, I had three runs and landed just one, an 18lb'er, all runs again coming to sub-surfaced fished lives. I remember settling down for that last night thinking this is your last chance for a biggun but then saying out loud "You greedy bastard". I missed the first run and silently cursed after recasting. It went again, I must have dropped it right on its head, I felt more of the same power I had previously so I knew this could be special, it was quite a narrow swim with over hanging trees either side of me, so it had me leaning out to put maximum pressure on the fish with my 4lb tc spod rod bent to its limit just to get

it out in open water I could feel the line pinging off tree branches and cringed but managed to bring it to the waiting net, a lot of the carp lads on there have a laugh when they see the size of my 60" net but the fish wasn't amused at all and slid straight in.

What can I say, I had another beast and at 67lb 4oz 70" long 31 1/2" girth and another new personal best. SPEECHLESS.!

Like I said, memorable, memorable fishing I'd done a total of 22 nights, had 45 runs taking 19 cats including a 40, 2x50's and 2x60's and including two new personal bests, on reflection not a great hook up rate but I put that down to small kittens, anyway I'm not complaining too much.



A nicely marked
night time twenty