

The Diary of an Advanced Beginner




Derek Howie

In June 2004 and after a 20 year hiatus from fishing, I still had most of my tackle and fly tying materials. I began to get the urge to start angling again. This was mainly due to two things; the access I had to the wealth of fishing shows on the Discovery Real-time channel that I'd been watching for several years previously; and more importantly now, a car. The money left over from the purchase of my first motor in nearly 9 years was soon spent on new fly-fishing and fly-tying gear. As I was now very much mobile, I travelled all over North-East Scotland chasing stocked rainbow and wild brown trout. We are really blessed with a huge choice of day ticket and club waters.

In my first year I managed 74 sessions and I was very impressed with a total of 398 fish including one 19lb 12oz pig of a rainbow trout on just a 6lb leader. When I wasn't on the bank, I'd be hunched over a fly-vice at home, re-learning the art of fly tying that I picked up at a lunchtime fly tying club at school when I was 13. I could tie a fly before I could cast a one and, before you ask, no, I didn't go to some posh school. It was a brand new council school which had just opened with only 1st and 2nd year pupils.



After 3 seasons of generally out fishing my brother and most of the other anglers at the many venues I fished, I was looking for something different. I took part in a few competitions which resulted in a 2nd and a 3rd place, but that wasn't really a fun experience for me. Another option was



sea fishing as there are plenty of good coastlines around these parts. I have lived on the coast all my life and I'm actually a bit scared of the sea and its power and I didn't really *do* boats. Then there's always the famous salmon and sea-trout fishing, which would seem like the obvious progression for a fly angler who's requiring more of a challenge. Although the thought of angling for horny fish from the sea just did not appeal to me at all.

So what was left- coarse fishing in Aberdeen? This could be a far-fetched notion!

There were always far more coarse angling magazines than any other genre in the local W.H. Smith, especially the titles about carp fishing. I had seen Chris Yates and Bob James, and their 'A Passion for Angling' series. The episodes featuring carp fishing look very, very interesting and a lot of fun and there was also plenty of it mentioned on the other angling programmes. However, Google didn't really show an abundance of carp waters up here so geographically I was on to a slow start.

After some internet searching and buying all the carp magazines, I really had my heart set on trying this carp fishing malarkey. With information gleamed from some forum chats with members on the Scottish Carper Forum, I decided to join the S.C.G. and then proceeded to buy a Wychwood carp set-up. I now had the basic hardware required to go carp fishing, but still needed the end tackle and naively bought anything that the monthly's had featured, tubing, beads, clips, hooks, leads, shot, swivels, rings, etc. all in various colours and all generally not needed. (Hindsight is a wonderful thing) A similar thing happened regarding the bait. Most of the magazines indicated that boilies were very good and being a newbie I believed them. As a fly angler I had started to build knowledge of entomology (that's the study of insects), there was only one logical choice, I thought: bloodworm boilies. However the pineapple flavoured pop-ups seemed very popular, as were those tutti-frutti ones, and then sweetcorn and prepared hemp seed appeared essential. Every month it appeared there was bait I needed to use.

"and then I had another dilemma. I had just 2 rods, but 6 different baits....aaaahh!"

It was June 2007 when I was ready for my first Scottish carp fishing session. It took 2 hours to fit everything into my little Ford KA and a further 2 hour drive to Kinghorn Loch and then another 2 hours setting up before I even thought about fishing (I hadn't even used a fixed spool reel before) and then I had another dilemma. I had just 2 rods, but 6 different baits....aagghh! Even though I got some good advice from Colin 'Chalky' Whyte, I was so far out of my depth and unsurprisingly blanked. It became clear I was at the bottom of a near vertical learning curve on massive water with about 100 carp in it, but the most important thing was, I was carp fishing.

The next session I decide to try the smaller, now ex-S.C.G. water, Little Glenniston. On arrival I saw a group of 10 carp in a shallow bay, what a boost that gave me! I then proceeded to carry the mountain of gear, quietly...not, into position and scare all the fish at the same time. That was now 2 blanks in a row. I did meet another angler that day, called Barrie. He and I fished several sessions together at 'The Glennie' and I was very grateful for the help and company he provided. This type of carp fishing was rather new to him as well. We even spend a whole session with a marker float on the old quarry, to plot the depth and features onto a map; it had a very uneven bottom and

extremely steep, jaggy sides. With one particular flat area we found, I decide to start a prebaiting campaign. That meant I drove 1000 miles over a 5 week period to bait up with 3KGs of my chosen boilies and pellets along with some bloodworm liquid, then fish on the 6th week. Was I keen or mad? All those hours I spent on the road and I didn't have anything to show for it. That was now 5 sessions and 5 blanks. I did say I wanted more of a challenge.

In February 2008 I returned again to Fife for my 6th carp fishing trip in 9 months. With Little Glenniston frozen over I went to Kinghorn Loch and notched up 6th straight blank. I had plenty of time to master my little compact camera waiting for some action.

For my 7th session I had added a 3rd rod to my set-up and it was on this trip that I caught my first ever coarse fish. It wasn't a roach or a perch or even a carp but an 8lb Pike, hooked fair and square in the bottom lip on 2 x 10mm Spicy Sausage boilies. There is a photo of me with this fish and you can clearly see tears in my eyes. I was ecstatic, I had finally caught something!



I had 3 more blank sessions at Kinghorn before Barrie and I went to Wyreside Lakes, near Preston for my birthday. Surely I'd get a carp there. Surprisingly we both blanked at the usually productive fishery, although I did receive what I thought was my first ever runs, but who knows? As there was nothing attached when the rod was picked up. It was also the first time I had seen someone else catch a carp in the flesh.

50 days past before I next met Barrie again, at another new venue for us, Fintry. I will never forget what happened on that trip. I had read it was a very silty water and opted to try a Helicopter set-up for the first time. Previously at Wyreside, I had fished without leaders (not allowed) or tubing and was amazed at the lack of tangles I had. So I adopted this naked mainline approach at Fintry. At 11.05PM on a cold November night I was woken by the 'beep, beeeep, beep, beeeep...' of one of my alarms. Shooting into the darkness, without either my shoes or a head torch and shaking with both nervous and the low temperature, I singlehandedly played and landed a mirror carp of 13lb 12oz.

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It didn't matter how big or smaller it was, it was my first carp and this photo and the actual rig with bait attached still adorn my living room wall today. It was a very proud moment in my life. I was a carp angler now. After 11 sessions totalling 534 hours fishing I had finally caught a carp!

I did 3 more blank sessions to Fintry in 2009; it was on my last ever session on the loch that I actually saw another Scottish carp banked, by Mark Stone. Is it really this hard? That session brought my tally of hours on the bank to 683 for just 1 beautiful, but solitary carp, that's the equivalent of living on the bank for the whole of February for just one bite!

Around this time I finally managed to get tickets for Glastonbury Festival 2010. It would be my 5th Glasto' but my wife had never been and with a 1 in 650000 chance of getting a ticket, I was as happy when I caught that Fintry fish. So everything else had to be put on hold, and I mean everything! I didn't even renew my fly-fishing club membership. We did have a blast! If I hadn't caught that carp from Fintry I'd probably have sold my carp gear to fund the next trip to the Somerset festival.

Fast forward a little to 2013, and as my carp tackle just gathered dust, having already failed to get tickets for the last 3 Glastonbury Festivals, I thought it was about time I started carp fishing again. I checked and cleaned all my carp gear. Apart from some new mainline everything seen OK and I started to formulate some sort of plan. Firstly, a membership for the S.C.G. was bought and time off work had to be booked and I decided to coincide 3 separate weeks off work with the lunar calendar. I planned to be on the water during a full moon, then the new moon and on my third trip the full moon, again. I believed what I'd read, but I'm just a heathen from the frozen North!

With far more catch reports being posted than on any of the other S.C.G. waters, I chose to fish Lanark Loch. Now, trying to learn from my past mistakes, I wanted to be a lot more mobile this time around and to fish 'off the barrow'; the access around the loch seemed to be perfect for this.

As for bait, I was going to stick to boilies. All the information on the various carp forums was to choose one, have confidence in your bait and stay with it. So having had 2 runs at Wyreside and having caught my only carp all on the same bait, I certainly had confidence in this bait. It had been mentioned that the birds on Lanark also like their boilies, but my chosen bait was also available in black.

'Sorted', I thought.

As it turned out the gulls did struggle to picking out the darker version after they hit the surface. I must admit I wasn't able to resist a few of extra tubs of pop-ups, some tiger nuts and another black boilie to add to the armoury.

A plan was taking shape. Next, rigs were researched, tied, tinkered with in the bath and re-tied. Again I had a preconceived idea of what I wanted to do, with a little bit of logic behind it. Pop-ups seemed to overcome the problem of presenting a hookbait over any lakebed, and my chosen bait was available as a paste and cork dust pop-up as well as standard version in several fluorescent colours. I now felt like I had options available, rather than decisions to make.



The road atlas was checked, loch maps and hourly weather reports were printed off, the car was loaded and I was ready. I was going carp fishing.

After the 156 mile drive, I started on the planned walk round, but only made it a third of way when I met Willie and Colin. They were two locals carp anglers who had been watching and uneventfully stalking fish in Island Bay. After the formal introductions and handshakes, I impressed upon them that I was open to any local information. Colin, who is one of the SCG bailiffs, took me back round to the 20 Point swim and indicated to one of the major features of that area. It was now early evening and after a rather long drive, I felt tired. However, I did have enthusiasm and Colin's view on rigs to keep me fired up. "Choddies are the way forward", he stated, as I started to erect the rods and reels to do battle.

His suggestion echoed my thoughts of a first line of attack and a vacant 20 Point swim, I chose to set-up there. Although this time around I managed to get some bait out and the rods were fishing before the bivvy was off the barrow. That was a first for me, I was learning.

I was knackered, but before nodding off I set my phone for 04.00, which was always in the plan. Although the first night was unproductive, I woke up to see fish crashing within casting range and near to where I'd put bait the previous evening, this was amazing! It felt like I was *actually* carp fishing, just like I'd seen on the television. Funnily enough it was only a few years ago that I discovered that the Sky Sports 'Thinking Tackle' show wasn't actually about rugby. Although I did cast at these surfacing fish, and having met more carp anglers there was nothing to report from anyone on my first full day on Lanark Loch. Throughout the day I baited the same area every 3 or 4 hours, smoked fags and drank coffee far more often than that. Finally, with the rods out for the night, 2 with a chod rig and the other with another first for me, a hinged-stiff rig, I retired to the bedchair around 23.00.

"I was then reawakened an hour later by the 'beep, beep, beep, beeeeeeep of one of my alarms and not the one on my phone"

With the alarm on my phone already being set for 04.00, I awoke again. Having blanked on my first 36 hours (nothing new there), I was definitely going to move swims once I'd got up and keep to the mobile approach, but I drifted back off to sleep. I was then reawakened an hour later by the 'beep, beeeeeeep, beep, beeeeeeep...' of one of my alarms and not the one on my phone.

'Oh shit....' I thought.

I dived out of my sleeping bag fully clothed, except for boots. On picking up the middle rod, I felt a 'Bump, bump....bump'.

I said to myself, 'There is a fish on here, so keep calm, just keep calm', 'Oh don't come off, please don't come off'.

I don't know which one of us was more panicked, me or the fish, because not long after that, I could see the rounded shape of a carp in the water and I had to net it myself. I had only done this once before, that being at night in the dark at Fintry, again without footwear. I was now, really shaking.

In my head I could hear those TV anglers saying 'Get its head up, keep its head up, and keep it coming'.

There wasn't any real drama because at the first attempt the fish went into the net. I had just landed my second ever carp, YES! YES! YES! YEEESSSS!!!

"I put the kettle on and got the tobacco pouch out and tried to calm down"

After cutting the mainline and transferred the fish straight from the net into a secured floating retention sling, I then set about sorting out my previously underused unhooking accessories: mat, weigh sling, water bucket, scales, forceps, and carp care kit. Next I set up the camera and remote. All this had been housed in a single bag, prepared for this very occasion. After checking on my catch, again, I put the kettle on and got the tobacco pouch out and tried to calm down. I was still shaking after the capture, what a feeling!

With the fish recording a weight of 12lb10oz, it was then onto capturing the moment. Luckily, I remembered that my new camera also has a 'face detection' feature, so I won't need to hold a slimy fish and a remote at the same time. The photo didn't turn out too bad, maybe I'll get a better picture next time.



'A little scaly beauty of 12lb10oz'

With the pictures done and the fish returned, I recast the successful rod and I just sat back with a massive smile on my face. The adrenaline was pumping so much, I just had to get up and punch the air on more than one occasion.

Whether it was naivety or common sense, all rigs were changed over to the hinged-stiff rig for the rest of my session. This didn't produce anymore fish for me, but that simply didn't matter. I had caught one on my first trip and I was thoroughly delighted. Considering the loch had 5 other anglers on it, only 2 other carp caught, by the loch bailiffs, 'Big' Colin and 'Little' Colin. I felt good about my achievement and couldn't wait to return.

With the break from work already booked, my next session on Lanark Loch was 11 days since I was last on the loch. With only 2 other anglers on, I was delighted that 20 Point was free. After a rather quick walk around the water, I set up in that swim. I preceded the same approach as before, with 2 chod rigs onto the baited area and a roving rod cast around the swim, this time with some home tied zig-bugs. As a keen fly fisherman and tier, I'd be foolish not to tie some up.



'A snail and a buzzer, zig-bug'

These ones failed to produce a response, this time. I had plenty others to try, but as there wasn't any fish showing, I resisted.

After trickling baiting in every few hours, while the rod were removed from the swim. I returned all 3 rods to chod rigs baited with pop-ups for the first night. The evening session past without any action and later that morning I started to bring in the rods, at around 9.30am.

After a late breakfast, it was time to recast some fresh rigs. This time with 2 hinged-stiff rigs and 1 chod rig, again baited with hook baits that matched my freebies. An hour had past when another angler, Eddie, introduced himself. Within minutes of me saying, 'Nothing yet, mate', my right hand alarm let out several bleeps and with line coming off the spool, the bobbin cracked against the blank. With the rod in hand I felt a 'Bump...Bump.....' then nothing. I had just lost my first fish.

'Chuck it back out' Eddie said sheepishly.

He later reviled he thought he had brought some of his bad luck with him, so with the rig and hook point checked, I attached 2 pieces of PVA foam around the now dry hookbait. Then launched this into the same location from where the last bite had occurred. Eddie went on his way to set up, choosing the calmer water opposite The Island.

2 hours went by and just as I decided to make yet another coffee with a matching roll-up, the right hand alarm screamed 'Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeepppppppppppp...' a real 'one toner'. I did check to see if a

duck had picked up the line in the margins, but no it was a fish. I was a little less nervous this time, although with the line coming out the water at an odd angle close in and the fish still 50 yards away, I was a bit apprehensive. The mainline soon worked its way out of the marginal obstruction and I could concentrate on playing the fish again. As I was edging the fish toward the net, I could see I had hooked a common carp. I hadn't caught a common before, and it didn't want to be 'caught'. It took me 3 attempts to finally get the fish into the net and soon I let out a loud 'YES! YES! YES! YEEESSSS!'

That's 2 fish in 2 sessions. I couldn't believe it; the lunar calendar theory just might be true.

Quickly, I asked a nearby angler to help out with the weighing and photography, so many thanks to you Billy. Again, I thought to myself, I must remember about the 'face detection' feature on my camera. The fish was 13lb5oz, and even stuck up its dorsal fin for the photo- now that was cool!



Every day I chose to rest the swim, and today wouldn't be any different. With the lines out of the water at 16.00, I started cooking the now mandatory evening meal of Kung Po chicken. As I was also getting the rigs ready for the night, a fish surfaced quite close in. Soon after, it surfaced again, but this time I was ready with a baited rig. Bang! I cast it right into the rings left by the surfacing fish. Alas, I was able to enjoy my stir fry in peace. Just after 21.00 all 3 rods were in position on top of the baited area and I knew this would probably be the last casts I would be making on this trip. I had promised my wife I'd come home early if I had caught, and she didn't know of my recent capture. That night it was really quiet on the fish front, I didn't see or hear any fish crashing.

Just after dawn I saw some bubbling, and then a fish surfaced, so I set up a snowman rig with a little PVA stick then put out 4 other PVA sticks around the rig with the catapult. However the activity soon stopped, and all I could do was pack up, but very, very slowly. Sadly, it would be a whole month before I could get back to Lanark.

The month passed rather quickly and I was soon on the road to Lanark, again. To say my confidence was high, would have been an understatement, especially after my previous captures. With the chore of the driving the first half of the 300 mile round trip out of the way, I started on a reconnaissance walk round. I saw no signs of carp around the loch and inevitably set-up in my now favourite swim, 20 Point. First things first, I put out some boilies with the throwing stick, and then set up the rods. The 1st rod one went out on a home tied zig bug, matching the hatch of the insect activity I saw during the walk round. This was followed by the 2nd and 3rd rods both with food based pop-ups. As I was sorting out the bobbin on the 3rd rod, I heard the 'whizz' of the baitrunner on 1st rod. Strangely, I didn't hear the alarm and I had not plugged in the remote transmitter on that alarm (that's something I just did at night, but not now!). By the time I got to the rod the fish was gone, which was not a good start. Even after the complete novice's mistake, at least my home made zig-bugs work.

Word must have got out that a guy from Aberdeen had had a couple from this swim because later that afternoon Jamie, Willie & John, all set-up either side of me. Although I felt a little hemmed in, I was keen to learn something from these experienced coarse anglers.

With fish clearly in the swim, the rods cast out for the night. I checked and rechecked that the alarms were on and the transmitters and receiver were all synced. It didn't take long for the 2nd run of the session, just 20 minutes to be precise. However, there was no fish attached when I picked the rod up. The score was now Carp 2, me 0.

Following an uneventful night, I was up and awake before the sun. The rigs were all tied, baited and cast out just after 06.00am, long before the other anglers surfaced. I had another run around 09.15, but again failed to connect with a fish: 3-0. This was getting embarrassing, mainly because of the other fishermen present.

What happened next was even worse than before. Just after 10.00pm, I received a screaming take on the left hand rod. This fish had picked up the line on the middle rod as well and, after about 7 or 8 minutes of a fight, what felt like a really good fish, came off. "Not again" I thought.

That rod was recast with a freshly baited rig and I then set about sorting out the middle rod which had appeared to have been picked up by the fish. But no- the fish was actually on this rod and it was still attached! This was certainly a good fish; it was far heavier than any other carp that I had caught before. However, the bad luck continued as the fish became weeded up and wouldn't budge. Willie advised me to give out some slack line and put the rod back on the rest. As I trained myself to be patient, a coffee and rollie were consumed while I hoped the fish might free itself from the weed bed, but after 10 minutes the line was still stuck solid.

It was either heave or get wet and go in after it. I decided to heave, but having very little experience of this sort of situation, it was difficult to tell if I was still connected to the fish or that I was just pulling the rig through a large weed bed. I put a huge amount of pressure on the rod and eventually the rig came free, but without the fish. There was a silence in the 20 Point swim; you could hear a baiting needle drop. Willie, Jamie & John did their best to pick me up, but I was gutted. That was now 4-0 to the carp and I went for a sulk in my bivvy.

After a few hours of feeling sorry for myself, both Willie and the ever helpful bailiff Colin looked at my rigs. Firstly, my top bead was far too loose and they had never seen a Hinged Stiff rig fished on a helicopter set-up before, I was really surprised by this! From what I'd read in magazines and on the various forums, it was pretty much the standard practise to fish it like that. However I switched both the Hinged Stiff rigs over onto lead clips and fished a chod rig on a leadcore leader with the lead on the end, which Colin had supplied and set up. I was also told that I fishing with my mainline far too slack, and tightened that up as well.

I fished through the night with these rigs, but didn't have as much as a line bite. I now had very little confidence as it was and had even less with this new lead arrangement. I couldn't wait to go back to my naked helicopter set-up that had done well previously. I just didn't fancy explaining to Colin that his leadcore was in the bottom of my tackle bag, instead of on the bottom of the loch. Although to his credit, the advice about my slack mainline and my top bead being too loose were very much taken onboard.

The next day the weather conditions were relatively poor for fishing. That old adage of 'With winds from the East, the fish bite least' certainly held true, as John didn't even add to his total of 8 pike for the session. Later that evening the wind changed direction and dropped in strength. This change in the weather raised our spirits albeit slightly. John was even catching pike again. With the rods out for 20.15, I retired to my sleeping back to wait for an expectant 'beep, beep, beeeeeppppppp!' from an alarm.

Again, I was up before dawn and still fishless. I could see that there was clearly fish bubbling further down the loch. Yesterday Colin had mentioned about stalking for carp very early in the morning, so I decided I'd give that a go. Having wound in my left hand rod, I was busily preparing that with a new rig when the right hand alarm gave out 5 or 6 bleeps and I was on it in an instant. On lifting up the rod, there was a boil on the surface. Then nothing, agghhh!!! I was having an absolute nightmare of a session. Lanark Carp 5, Aberdeen Angler 0.

With 2 rods out of the water, they were both readied for stalking. All that was left to do was wind in the 3rd rod. So with some bait in my hoody pouch pocket and a catapult round my neck and the landing net and rod rests in the unhooking mat, off I went for an hour's stalking. Several patches of bubbles were cast upon, but unsurprisingly they stopped after I had put a lead near them. No luck there then!

On returning to base camp at 20 Point I thought I'd put all the rods back out for one last time, as Willie and John were also planning to leave that morning. All 3 rods were out and fishing as I began to start to pack everything away. About 30 minutes later I could hear a whizzing noise, it was the baitrunner on my right hand rod. I'd forgotten to switch the alarm back on and a fish was taking line from the spool. On picking up the rod, I was both relieved and nervous that the fish was still on.

'Is it on?' Willie asked. I gave him a thumbs up.

'I'm on my way' he replied.

By now I was gaining on the fish, and Willie was poised with the net. I didn't feel that big as it was coming in rather easily.

'Is that a tench' asked Willie.

'No talking' I snapped.

'Sorry Willie' I was just trying to concentrate.

'Oh no, that's a little common' he said, 'Now there's no rush, Derek'.

I could now see a common carp in the clear water and that made me go a little weak at the knees. The fish wasn't ready for the net at the 1st attempt, but at the 2nd time it was.

I let out a 'YES! YES! YES! YEESSSS!'



Finally, I'd scored a carp. Although in the grand scheme of the session, it was a consolation carp, but still a carp. At just 9lb 8oz, it was a great end to a frustrating session.

Over the 3 trips, I'd fish on Lanark for 169 hours and saw 5 carp banked, and I had caught 3 of them. Not bad for a beginner; I've still to blank on Lanark Loch, maybe next time?

Tightlines,

Derek