

JERRY HAMMOND'S

BIG-FISH ANGLE

OFF TO PASTURES NEW...

Crafty's resident big-fish expert **Jerry Hammond** started the month with a very successful session at the historic Birch Grove, but his plans for the year were thrown wide open with the sad demise of his target fish. With mixed emotions and his enthusiasm waning, the big-carp flame was reignited on his first visit to a new water.

Jerry Hammond



Age 44

Hometown
Broxbourne

Occupation
Fishery manager

UK PB
48lb mirror, 43lb
common

Favourite venue
Carthage

Rods
Nash Extreme
Pursuit, 13ft 3½lb

Reels
Shimano Technium
Magnesium

Alarms
Steve Neville

The Main Boards Swim covers a great deal of water, and my instincts immediately drew me to this swim.



In my last piece I was about to head northwards to meet up with the editor Jerry Bridger on the famous Birch Grove. I must say I am not the greatest traveller; over long distances I get very bored, so this had to be a record for me – a 3-hour+ journey for an overnighter.

Madness I know, but nevertheless I loaded up and I headed towards Shropshire. On the journey I tried to picture the lake from memory, as I had seen the Birch Grove videos that Tim had made years ago. I wasn't really sure what resided in the lake any more, but I do know that the big fish in there were very famous at the time, and were very big for that part of the country. Anyway, I was looking forward to getting there and having a look around, and we had the lake to ourselves.

Jerry was an hour or so behind me en route, and as I turned onto the track that led down to the lake I got a funny feeling, as if I had just pulled into some historic place – maybe it was just me thinking about all the anglers who had dabbled there over the years. As soon as I got out of the car that all drifted away and I was into angling mode; my eyes were everywhere as I walked down the main bank. Anglers can only fish from the one bank, and there's just one other swim at the beginning of the opposite bank; there are only six or seven swims on the lake, which is 5 acres in size, so there's plenty of room. The swims are big jetties made from wood, and as I made my way to the last swim, for some reason I just knew this was where I wanted to fish. In the corner to the right, as the lake curved round, the whole area was covered in lily pads. It did look very carpy, and obviously this area was shallower than the rest, otherwise

the pads wouldn't be able to grow. Carp do love the pads for many reasons, and as I scanned the water I saw a few feeding bubblebers and then the old telltale signs of the pads twitching as the carp made their way through the stems. Carp hold up in the pads in the sun to escape the heat of the day, but the pads also hold a variety of natural foods, snails being one of their favourites in these areas.

Anyway, this set of pads was the biggest in the lake, and I soon had my car parked behind the swim, which was handy. As I started to get a few bits out of the van a carp launched itself from the pads, and I knew I had given myself the best chance for an overnighter. When Jerry eventually arrived we had a quick brew; he was as unfamiliar with the place as I was and was keen to get looking about and settled in his swim.

My approach was to fish one rod just a little way down to my right; there was a little derelict jetty that didn't look too safe, but with care I would be able to use it, and from there I fancied a spot on the edge of the lily pads. I would be able to get some hemp on it, either by way of a pole with a baiting spoon or with a pocket spod. To this spot I would fish a Snowman with White Amber Attract; I wanted a visual bait over the hemp because as I looked into the lake it looked dark and gloomy and I wanted my bait to stand out.

I had braid on as my main line on this rod. I really do like using the braid and I felt it would help me with the lily pads. My other rods were fished to little bays in the pads, with Chod Rigs and White Amber pop-ups, and I spread a few handfuls of freebies around the two rods. Not long after getting ready for the evening, my rod on the hemp burst into life. I was standing near it so I was on it fast, and after a short spirited fight I landed a dumpy silver common, a right little tough nut.

"I got a funny feeling, as if I had just pulled into some historic place"



Another view of Birch from the far side, which highlights the intimate nature of this beautiful lake.



Jerry had come back round as I was putting the common back, and he took a little snap just in case the photo was wanted for the records. Jerry was there for a couple of nights because he was meeting up with local angler Ellis Brazier the next day. I wanted to get up to date with the lake and find out all about it.

Jerry had chosen the only swim on the other bank, which looked to be a nice area with some good-looking marginal spots. When Ellis arrived he was amazed that I had caught one of the little ones, and it turned out to be one of the new stockies. There were around 30 of this new stock and he said they very rarely got caught. Ellis told me that there were several good original 30s plus lots of mid-to upper-20s to go at and that night I wondered what my chances were of catching one of the big originals.

Just before dark Jerry went back to his swim and got his rods out, and I fished under the stars and read a couple more chapters of my book until I couldn't keep my eyes open any more. At around 3.00 a.m. one of my Chod rods was signalling a

take. I was up in an instant and running down the long jetty. As I lifted into the fish it immediately took some line and was bobbing and weaving through the pads; this rod was on 15lb Bullet main line. I was trying to gain some control over this fish and the rod fished down to the right kept on bleeping away – I feared that maybe I had somehow got caught up with it. A few times the bobbin smacked into the butt and nearly lifted the rod off the rest; the fish on the Chod rod had locked itself up in the pads and had come to a standstill. I put that rod back on its rest and loosened the clutch slightly, then picked up the other rod, thinking it was somehow attached, but as I did it started to take some line – then it hit me that I had, in fact, had two takes at once.

This fish came towards me and was soon in front of the jetty in the deeper water. Under the rod tip she slowly started to tire and I was getting it on the surface, and after two or three more big boils on the top I slid the net under a rather large common. It was light enough to see, so I had a quick look in the net before I went and collected all the necessary equipment, and it looked a good size. I leant over the jetty and unhooked my catch; the fish was perfectly OK sitting there, so I picked up the other rod that was still solid. After a while it just pulled free and I reeled in the rig. I eventually got hold of Jerry on the phone, and he was up because he had just had his second fish of the night, taking two cracking mid-20 commons.

As I lifted my fish to the unhooking mat, I felt the weight of a 30-pounder, and at a weight of 32lb 8oz I was over the moon – an original Birch big 'un for sure. The photos were done and I slipped back one of the old school – my trip was well and truly worth it. Before my session came to an end Jerry had landed another 20lb common, and I had a cracking 20lb linear and another couple of my little stockie friends, making six takes in all. Jerry also lost one, so ten takes in a night was very good going, and when Ellis heard what we had caught he was gobsmacked.

Birch Grove is no pushover, and our catch was very good indeed; it just goes to show how a lake can change from one day to the next.

"I was over the moon – an original Birch big 'un for sure"



This 32lb 8oz original Birch common made the long trip so worthwhile.





My session was starting to heat up when I slipped the net under this cracking 20lb+ linear.

Jerry stayed an extra night with Ellis, as planned, and there wasn't a single bite. I was so tired on the journey home because I'd had no sleep, and on the long drive back I was struggling big-time. I had The Jam playing full blast and the window wide open, and occasionally I had to slap myself around the face to stay awake; a few pit stops for strong black coffees soon sorted me out.

The start of the season at the Yateley Car Park Lake was fast approaching, and I was so looking forward to the summer ahead in my quest to catch Heather the Leather. I made the trip to the draw for swims one Sunday and history repeated itself; I came out last, as I always do – this has happened for many years on all the lakes I have fished, and I knew it would again. On the long journey home, stuck in traffic on the M25, I wondered why I put myself through it. Anyway, after 48hrs I would be on the lake, and as it turned out, the swim I fancied was the same as last year, The Chair Swim. At the start last year, the weather was hot and the carp were in the vicinity of my swim, as they started to gather for the lead-up to spawning. This year it was rainy and cooler, but when I was due there, the forecast had predicted some hot weather. I thought this might be an omen and it was meant to be, that's why I didn't get a draw. I would be at the lake early on the Wednesday morning, hopefully get in The Chair Swim, and all would be good. On the Tuesday Jerry texted me to ask if it was true about Heather. 'Was what true?' I thought, and when I rang Jerry he told me he had heard that Heather had been found dead. I immediately called my mate, who was fishing The Chair, and he informed me they had found her and were just about to bury her.

Gutted – that's all I can say really, not so much because I didn't get the chance to catch her, but

because such an old famous fish was now gone. To me she was the Car Park Lake and I haven't been back since. I don't think I can fish the place now, knowing she is no longer swimming about out there. There's a little chair in one of the swims that always gets moved about from swim to swim, and it has the words 'Heather tonight' carved into it – well it won't be tonight, it won't be ever again. Thanks to the old carp for making so many people happy.

Since the passing of Heather, I have had to make new plans. I found it hard to get my enthusiasm back, like you do when you are trying to target a

big fish. I am the sort of angler who needs one to go after, but the trouble today is there are so many. My very good mate Nige Sharp was good

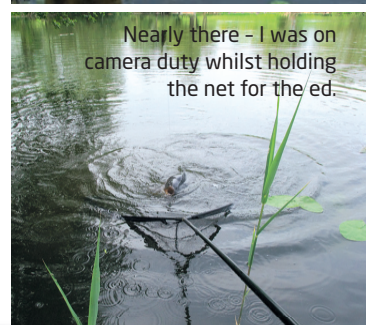
to talk to at this time, and he got me all fired up about Burghfield. I have always fancied a go there; I do love the big lakes, and it would be heaven to fish a water where you aren't surrounded by lots of anglers – but where to start on a place like that – 100 acres and 5 miles to walk round if you walk every bit of it. Obviously Nige had been a great help, and through speaking to him I could tell that he really loved his time on there, so I decided to do a couple of nights for a recce.

I didn't turn up until fairly late, and without too much time to go walking about I opted to fish off the end of one of the points, just for the night, and go for a walk about in the morning.

"I don't think I can fish the place now, knowing she is no longer swimming about out there"



I wandered round to do editor Jerry's pictures and one of his rods rattled off.



Nearly there - I was on camera duty whilst holding the net for the ed.



A stunning Birch common for Jerry.

First night success with this Burghfield 25-pounder.



I also managed to fit in some floater fishing on a quiet water near my home - the carp weren't hard to find.

The daylight was fading so I fished one rod to the margin of an island to my right (tiger nut over hemp), another in the left margin, and the third on a Chod on a weedy bar. It was dark before I knew it, and because I was tired I soon drifted off to the land of dreams about huge carp. At 3.30 a.m. my island rod was absolutely melting off, and like a robot I was up and playing this very unexpected fish. I couldn't even work out what lake I was fishing on as I looked out across this huge stretch of water. There was a channel to my right that went into one of the many bays and this fish was trying its hardest to get round there. I managed to coax it back my way; once in front it then steamed off to my left, trying to get to some overhanging trees. All the time I couldn't believe I was into a fish, and at one stage I was just waiting for it to fall off - I would then wake up and find it had all been a dream. But this was no dream, and that was confirmed when she slipped into the net. I was as pleased as Punch - a Burghfield fish on my first night - this couldn't be true. It was a nice mirror that went 25lb, but because I was on my own I had to do some self-takes, which is something I will have to get used to. I had forgotten my tripod so I used two buckets, and they weren't the best shots. If there is a next time I will be better prepared.

'Well,' I thought, 'there you go.' I was off the mark but by no means did I think this was going to be the norm, it was just beginner's luck. I fished the following week but the weather wasn't ideal - NE winds, not much sun, and the carp were hard to find, so I decided to have a week's break and recce another water I have in mind for the autumn. This lake holds a carp that has gone over 50lb and I have managed to catch a cracker from there already, so join me next time and I will tell you how the session went. I will be back over to Burghfield and I'll tell you how I covered my approach to this monster of a lake.

Good luck, Jerry. **CC**