

EDITOR TIM PAISLEY'S CARP LEADER



The honeymoon session. When Fred J. was around the drinking started as soon as the sun was over the yardarm!

Openers, Talking Points and Carp-Catching Contributors



I'm tidying up the emails, and today's date keeps cropping up. 15th June. The sun is shining, the world is as green as it can only be at this very green time of year, and my mind keeps wandering back to the daydream that I should already be bivvied up by the side of some remote lake waiting for the magical expectancy of midnight to arrive. Memories... For me, I guess 15th June will always mean my first day on the Mangrove back in 1983, but I've been the Mangrove route lately in terms of reminiscences, and really – 1983 apart – Snowberry in the '70s and Birch Grove in the '90s are the periods when the opening of the season was at its most memorable.

I know the close season made little or no sense to carp anglers because the carp invariably waited till it was over before they started spawning, but there was undoubtedly a magic to the mid-June start that has now been lost, presumably for ever, apart from on those waters where the close season is still adhered to. But even on those waters I would

guess that most of the anglers who fish the start there have already been fishing other waters prior to midnight on 15th June!

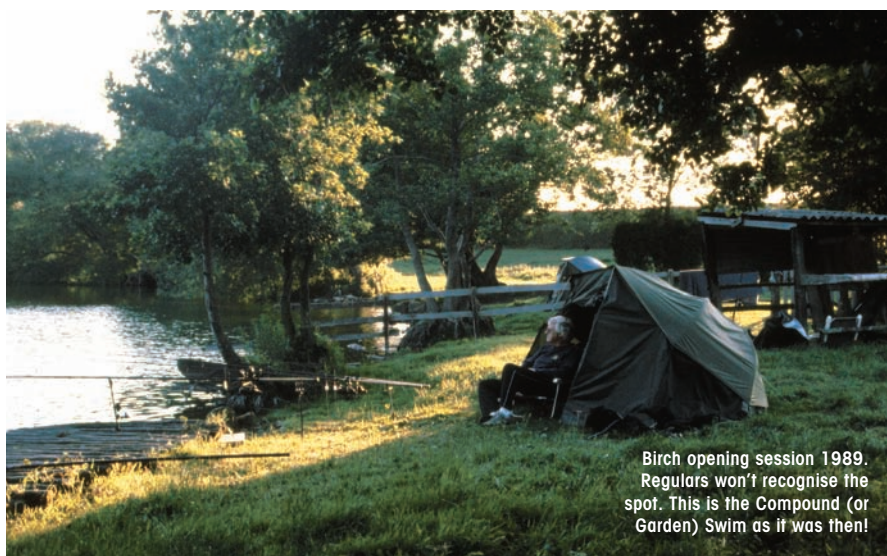
Snowberry came into my life when I was in the first full flush of carp-fishing addiction. It held doubles and in 1976 and 1977 a double was the height of my ambition. I didn't catch one in 1976 so the three-month

break leading up to mid-June 1977 was all the more breathtaking. By then I knew about luncheon meat, which the Snowberry carp loved, and that was the bait that accounted for my first double on, or soon after, opening day 1977. There were no carp magazines then apart from the BCSG's *The Carp* – which I didn't have access to – so I thought that luncheon meat was a cutting-edge bait. Where was the grapevine back then when we really needed it? Fred Wilton's bait theories had been published five years previously and Redmire was the centre of the particle bait universe, but at that time carp innovations dribbled through to you years after the in-crowd got in on them, and even then you had to figure out much of it for yourself.

The excitement I felt at being in with a chance of a double puts emphasis on what Redmire anglers of the time must have gone through in terms of expectations and hope. By the time I caught my first double, Rod Hutchinson had already left the Redmire syndicate, leaving an indelible impression on the catch-record of the pool, as had Kevin Clifford, who was almost as successful at Redmire as Rod. It is difficult now to put the Redmire of then into perspective. It was to British carp fishing what Rainbow

is to global carp fishing now. Read Kevin Nash's interview in this issue and you will understand that 20s waters were thin on the ground in the '70s, yet here was a three-acre pool where 20s abounded, where there were 30s present, and the sky was the limit in terms of the weight of the biggest fish the pool might contain. But Snowberry was my Redmire at that time and the excitement of starting the season there was as intense as it has ever been since, simply because session fishing was new, all-invasive, and carp had me by the throat. When carp fishing means that much, size is immaterial, which remains a lesson to us all – especially me! We move on, but not necessarily forwards. If carp have you by the throat then it doesn't matter what they weigh, or what the rest of the carp world is doing. Just enjoy it, savour it even, and try to keep a sense of perspective, because in all honesty, in terms of sheer enjoyment it never gets any better.

Birch openings were different. They were New Year's Eve in mid-summer. The fishing mattered, but the fact that it was the start of the season mattered more, and we celebrated accordingly. I tend to steer clear of the 'by 'eck we supped some stuff'-type of reflections, and I tend not to drink at all when I'm fishing, but Birch openings were notable exceptions to that rule. Mary, of course, loved to have a reason for feeding and watering people, and Birch openings were looked on as such a reason. The fact that some of the openings were attended by major-league partiers like Fred J. Taylor, Tag Barnes, Alan Smith, John Lilley, Mick Sly, Alan Young, Dave Chilton, Chris Ball (before he slowed down, if he has slowed down), Pip, Jemima, and sundry other drop-outs and hangers-on and fallers-over meant that the alcohol intake always bordered on the excessive, and sometimes went well beyond that sensible measuring stick. There are occasions which stick in the mind more than others. I suppose the fact that Mary and I celebrated our wedding and spent our honeymoon at Birch set the template for future openings, and the picture from that honeymoon occasion is a joyous one, made



Birch opening session 1989. Regulars won't recognise the spot. This is the Compound (or Garden) Swim as it was then!

all the more special because it was one of Fred J.'s first visits to the Shropshire pool. Because Ken and Carole Townley lived in Cornwall, which never did have a close season, I think this was the first time they'd enjoyed an opening session, and enjoy it they did!

From then on we used to celebrate the opening on the afternoon and evening of 14th June so we were in some sort of fit state to start fishing at or about midnight on the 15th. One year someone brought a bottle of black Bacardi, claiming that it is lethal. It is! Lil and Smithy looked on the claim as a real challenge and eagerly attacked the bottle – and then proceeded to demonstrate that it was, indeed, lethal! One year Mick Sly arrived at lunchtime on the 14th with six bottles of champagne. Mary and I were already there, so the three of us felt it was only right that we toasted the new season before the others arrived. We must have toasted it a few times because we drank all six bottles before the evening celebrations started! It's a strange drink, champagne. You wake up next morning thinking how well you've survived the alcohol intake, but by mid-afternoon the shakes have set in and the previous afternoon and evening don't seem like such a good idea after all.

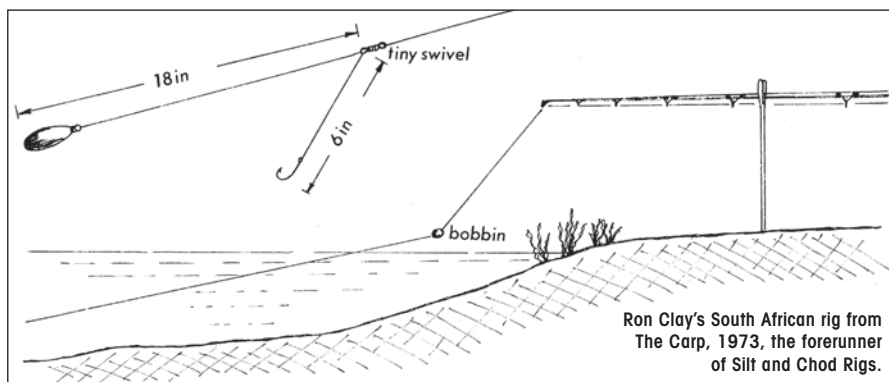
Mick Sly featured strongly another year when he introduced us to La Bomba, an unlikely and innocuous seeming mix of chocolate milk shakes and vodka. Each successive La Bomba was toasted with a chorus of the holiday song of the same name, which was popular at the time, and the drink slipped down so smoothly that it didn't feel like drinking alcohol at all. Later it did! The morning after the La Bomba session was the only occasion on which I can recall Mary not coming round in time to serve everyone with the mandatory huge breakfast. She was not a well person that morning!

Birch openings were special, and now the memory of them serves as an ongoing reminder that nothing that good lasts for ever. In all honesty, I knew that at the time and I always felt a huge sadness at the passing of the opening session. We were into another year and who knew what the future would hold? Since those carefree, rather silly days we have lost Mary, Fred J., Tag Barnes and Alan Smith, among others, and the openings have become rather staid, pleasant get-togethers for a few friends and members of the family at which absent friends are always remembered, and toasted. But the memories of the '90s openings are indelible, and treasured, and a constant reminder that carp fishing is about far more than the catching of carp. In truth, some of the people I have fished with along the way have made a much bigger impression on me than many of the fish I have caught over the years.

Talking of Birch, I mentioned in a recent Leader that during the winter we put an extra 50 carp into the pool and they appear to have made a dramatic difference to the fishing at Birch. My own efforts apart, we have been using the pool for the odd feature, and making it available to John Lilley and his friends while they have been carrying out improvements to the lodge during the non-existent close season. Some of the results have suggested that the pool is making a return to the 'bagging up' reputation it enjoyed in the early-'80s prior to the start of our relationship with it. Why did results



Birch Grove during the opening 'honeymoon' session, 1990.



"I can't help but be impressed by Jim Shelley's article, and his thinking, and his big-carp catching prowess"

there slow down? Because there was a period in the '80s when there was no close watch on the place and it was being used as a stock pond for a number of other waters in the northwest. Let's just say that many of the carp in Shropshire and Cheshire are much-travelled fish, which have now hopefully finished their journeying!

There is another instance of the way things change over the years in the Nashy interview, a story which actually stopped me in my tracks while we were taping the interview. It concerns the chain of events which resulted in Kev taking up carp fishing, which all started when he was dropped at the roadside in the middle of nowhere by his scoutmaster to be picked up later by his parents. His parents were delayed and Kev, who was 12 at the time, was left at the roadside for some hours! He was then picked up by a friendly farmer, and eventually put on a train home. Now I can't help feeling that these days a tale like that would make the national press, and that being picked up by a friendly anyone would be risky in the extreme! I'd like to think that the '60s were comparatively innocent times but I'm more inclined to believe that Kev was just plain lucky in terms of who he was picked up by!

I try not to get too commercial in my writings, but we have to give credit where it's due and the material we are receiving courtesy of Dynamite Baits is very much appreciated. Former Carpworld editor Martin Ford is compiling the features on the bank and the Dynamite series has already included a revealing two-parter from the multi-talented Frank Warwick. This month we have a fascinating feature with Jim Shelley talking to Martin, and next month we start a mini-series featuring Terry Hearn. Terry will be focusing on that all-important topic of location – finding carp – and will later give us his slant on the creation and use of the Chod Rig. Look out for Terry, plus all the other

big names who are supporting us, in the upcoming issues of Carpworld.

In the meantime I can't help but be impressed by Jim Shelley's article, and his thinking, and his big-carp catching prowess. I'll keep out of the debate about the origins of the so-called Chod Rig because to me it looks very similar to setups that came out of the northwest meres in the '70s (which I used at Roman Lakes in the late-'70s), and which Hutchy used successfully at Savay in the '80s. I'm told that the difference between then and now is that the Chod Rig is used in conjunction with leadcore line, but as leadcore is banned on many waters, and I can see no reason why it isn't possible to fish a Chod Rig without using leadcore line, then I think there is some element of the re-invention of the wheel here anyway. The earliest illustration I can find of this type of setup actually came from Ron Clay while he was still in South Africa, and appeared in *The Carp* in 1973. It's possible that the northwest mere setup evolved from this principle. Yes, I know it is different from

the Chod setup now being used, but the principle is more or less the same, and the carp press seems to be treating the principle as a new one altogether. Does it matter? Probably not, but when it comes to the pioneering of methods and baits I always like to see credit given where it's due and I think there are a few short memories when it comes to the evolution of this particular setup.

Having said which, Jim Shelley's rationale of his use of the Chod Rig intrigued me, and his thought process struck me as a case of sorting the men from the boys! In the '70s, in winter we sometimes used the setup on a tight line (with the lead in the silt) to detect any possible movement and to have any pick-up registered at the rod setup. In other words, if it buzzed we struck it! Jim's explanation of why he uses the Chod Rig in the manner he fishes it (which he explains fully) intrigued me and made me start to rethink a great deal of my carp fishing. There is a saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but in carp fishing you have to move with the times because the times and the thinkers evolve methods which keep one step ahead of the thought processes – or conditioned reflexes if you like – of the carp. All of which means that this old dog may have to learn to rethink the needlepoint hook/heavy lead setup which is currently my main approach. I had been reading about Chod Rigs, of course: you can't publish and help compile two carp magazines without doing so, but I had started to wonder about the universal love affair with the setup, until I read Jim's explanation of his use of it. The intriguing thing about all that is that Jim admits that he started off by being totally unimpressed by the concept, too!

I think I should add that my initial disaffection with the Chod Rig stemmed from the fact that I do not like any setup where the lead is fished on the end of the line. These setups are fine in the hands of experts, but potential killers in the hands of mindless anglers who do not understand the niceties of carp safety – and I think we can all agree that there are far more thoughtless or uncaring anglers around than there are experts! So if you write about Chod Rigs, emphasise the safety aspect, as Jim does. If you use Chod Rigs, or Helicopter Rigs, or silt rigs, or whatever you want to call them, then please make sure that the carp can rid itself of the lead and line in the event of a breakage of the reel line. ➤



Jim Shelley; his thinking clearly shows why some carp anglers are more successful than others!

The reel line isn't going to break? I'm afraid it does. There are crack-offs, and there are cut-offs, and there are accidents, and without a doubt there are fish trailing line in many carp waters. There was one at Birch when I fished there during the work party weekends, and in recent months I have suffered from the phenomenon on both Rainbow and Gigantica.

For me this business of fish towing line makes an absolute nonsense of the barbed versus barbless hook debate. Some carp seem to be capable of getting rid of any hook, but others are less adept. What is unarguable is that they are more likely to get rid of a barbless hook than a barbed one. The main argument in favour of barbed hooks is the potential mouth damage if a hook tears out. Mouth damage heals, but tethered carp which die don't come back to life! You come across some strange contradictions at carp venues, the barbed or barbless issue being just one of them. I do not understand the ban on shockleaders for instance, and I think that the banning of leadcore is odd if you are not going to ban the alternatives, such as fluorocarbon leaders. The bans would make more sense if there was a line strength minimum specified on all carp waters, but on many there isn't one. Light line, no shock leader and a one metre fluorocarbon leader fished to a barbed hook is simply asking for trouble, particularly on gravel pits where cut-offs are an accepted hazard, and weedy waters where a line-strength minimum is an absolute must.

Coming back to the Chod Rig, if there are conflicts of interest out there about who invented what and when and why, it is not



The multi-talented Frank Warwick. Frank's comment about where the lead finishes up after casting made me think!

an area I'm trying to get involved in. I'm just making the point that the principle was in use through the '70s. I have the surname 'Southern' (Alan?) ringing some sort of a bell in connection with the pioneering of silt setups, but the northwest boys may be able to throw further light on that line of thought.

And talking about northwest angle- range fishing, Frank commented that when the lead hits the water the end tackle will swing back the distance of the depth of the water. Will it? I rang our My Way compiler, Jon

Banister – who happens to have underwater photography on his impressive CV – for his views on Frank's comment, and he agreed, which surprised me. As he is adept at doing an imitation of a seal, and writes for us, and is an old colleague of our Crafty Carper editor Jerry Bridger, I've asked Jon and Jerry (has a certain ring to it!) to get together over a feature investigating what actually happens between an end tackle hitting the surface of the water and reaching the bottom of the lake (rivers will be different because of the current).

There are so many variables involved in casting out an end tackle that I won't explore them all fully, but what I will say is that I have always been suspicious about this business of feeling for the 'donk', simply because I'm sure that will exaggerate the distance the lead swings back. If I'm casting into a hole in the weed, or to a marker float, then I try to let the lead drop fall freely through the water, although it's not always possible. Lakes invariably attract crosswinds, which necessitate some element of feathering down. A heavy lead will fall straighter than a lighter lead. Heavy line will have more influence on the drop than lighter line. And, of course the depth of the water will have a big influence on how far out from your intentions the end tackle touches down. Clipping up will certainly exaggerate the distance the end tackle comes back towards you unless you react accordingly as the lead hits the water. So we'll explore all this at a future date, but what I would say at this stage is that there is a simple test whereby you can check to see where your end tackle is hitting the bottom in relation to the marker float,



The offer- and flood-proof stock ponds (designed by John Lilley) after a close season of hard graft by the syndicate members.



Ben Gratwicke with the precious consignment of new mirrors arriving at the Mangrove.



One of the new fish.

"We have a record of the weights of all the new fish, and there is one leather-looking fish among them that looks almost certain to be the pick of the bunch size-wise"

or far margin, or snag you are casting to. Simply PVA a brightly-coloured pop-up to the end tackle before casting out and watch out for it hitting the surface when the PVA has dissolved. That way you will be able to gauge where the end tackle has landed. It may pay to make a few casts to check the difference between clipping up, feathering, and letting the lead fall free, so you know which is the most effective method in the situation in which you are fishing. Over to Jon and Jerry...

After our close season exertions of making the stock ponds otter- and flood-proof (to keep the otters out and the fish in) we have taken delivery of 25 mirror carp from Ben Gratwicke of Priory Fisheries in Devon. Ben's fish come on the back of some tremendous recommendations, but we're not willing to put the Mangrove and Birch fish at risk without mixing the two strains of fish in the stock ponds first. When we are sure that they mix all right we will be introducing some of the new fish to the Mangrove and Birch, and using some of them to interbreed with the Mangrove fish to produce a new strain for the future.

With the exception of the legendary Pinky, and one or two fish in the low-stock northwest meres, the ex-Isle fish don't have a great track record for growing to 40lb+. The ceiling in our, and neighbouring Shropshire waters has consistently been high-30s so we'll see what effect the new fish have in terms of the weight ceiling. The fish will stay in the stock ponds until this time next year, when we can be pretty certain that the mix of strains is working. We have a record of the weights of all the new fish, and there is one leather-looking fish among them that looks almost certain to be the pick of the bunch size-wise. Fingers crossed for the exercise to prove a success. It's certainly an exciting venture.

And talking of ventures... Congratulations to Carpworld contributors and Venture Products colleagues Simon Crow and Steve Briggs for their recent carp-catching exploits. While I was writing this Leader I rang Steve to see how he and Joan are getting along. They are fine, and Steve was just on his way to a local water to continue his pursuit of the Black Mirror. Literally hours later I received a text saying: "It's big, it's black, it's in my sack – 51lb 12oz." Prior to the capture Steve had put in 46 nights on the venue this year for just two fish, so his success is a startling and deserved one, and a reward for sticking at it on a notoriously difficult venue. Prior to Steve's success, Crowy had recently landed Black Eye from Chad Lakes at a weight in the mid-50s – which Simon decided not to check in the interests of getting the fish back in the water as quickly as possible. Two English 50s in the space of a few weeks for the two big mates! Well done you guys. How good is that? "Nice!" as Briggsy might say.

Oh well, onwards and upwards. I've recently returned from another Rainbow mauling and have two English sessions on different waters to complete so I can finish *More From the Bivvy* (the latest working title for the book), due out in the autumn. More urgently we are getting Julian Cundiff's *Short Session Success* book into production. I'm in regular contact with Jules over it and one of his recent emails revealed that the previous night he had landed eight fish, including four of 20lb+! Then he was off to work next day, like you would be. I'd need a week off work to recover from such a result, but there's no denying that our Jules can deliver the goods when it comes to short session carping. Read all about it in his new book, due out as soon as our overworked staff can get it to the printers. Watch this space. **TP**



Jules with one of his recent short session successes. His book *Short Session Success* is in production.