

Manic

by Maurice Pledger

A short piece from Maurice Pledger, which details the capture of some fine perch caught during an autumnal day from King's Weir.

I nearly didn't go on the 17th of October. Previous day I'd been to see Keith Linsell and it must've tied my stomach in knots; my nerves were playing me up so much that when I awoke it was turning over and over. Add to that my head felt like I was wandering about on the sea bed at 600 fathoms without a diving helmet, so all in all I wasn't feeling too good.

I phoned Dennis and the poor guy still wasn't right and declined the day's fish at Kings Weir. I turned on the computer, thinking that if my publishers had indeed sent my work in, I'd cancel the booking and at least sit at my drawing board for five minutes, then go back to bed. Nothing. Irritation at said publishers turned into imminent way of finding retribution at said publishers, added up to going fishing whatever the cost to stomach and head. All the other bits of my body (attached or seemingly otherwise) felt fine.

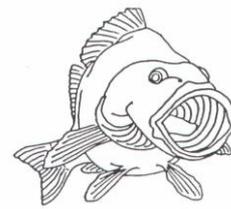
I cast out at 12.30pm.

The water in the pool was very low and clear. The character of the weir had changed considerably from the previous few trips when water was charging through, changing pace every few minutes, keeping me on my toes as to how I should control my tackle, where I should cast it, how best I could find slack areas and so on. Today was going to be a feel sorry for my stomach and head kind of day, cast out and not worry too much about the tackle because the lack of any kind of current wasn't going to do much with it anyway. I chose to go with a lovely old MK IV Avon and Mitchell 314, but within the first few seconds I could see I was going to have trouble with seeing bites. A strangely delicate take from a small pike had me wondering if I had had a take at all, so I changed over to my usual ultra-light quivertip set up.

An interesting thing. I'd previously attached a bean-sized piece of red buoyant 'rubber' from a deadbait pop-up ball I'd trimmed to size. This I'd fixed about 6" from the hook so the small livebait would actually rise up slightly from the riverbed, the red colour hopefully helping to attract the perch. On retrieving the bait on one cast, I noticed four small perch (three about 8oz, one about 4oz) hounding it as it came in. As I held it in about a foot of water, these four perch were obviously bristling with rage at this little roach, one of them butting at its flank, then backing off. The small one then actually swam around the bait, darted forward and took the red 'bean' for half a second and spat it out. Seemingly they didn't want to look at the bait as it was in such shallow water, it was actually swimming at the surface.

I kept dropping it in deeper water where they kept jabbing it but leaving it alone. I moved the bean way back to the swivel, allowing the bait to be able to drift down to the gravel at the bottom. Immediately I dropped it back in, the small perch darted forward past the roach and grabbed the bean again and spat it out, drifted back, saw the roach on the gravel and in a split second swallowed it in one go. I gave it a little flick, hooked it, whereupon the perch jiggled a few times and threw the hook. I thought the small roach had been through enough and let it go. It brought it home to me, although it was no surprise whatsoever, that you have to work for every fish here at the weir. That is what makes this place so interesting.

Firstly I've found perch will feed at all times of the day, although I must admit, the last hour and a half before dusk, generally becomes rather manic. Also, it matters not if the water is charging through, coloured or clear, high or low, you are always in with a chance. One thing I have noticed though, is that the lower the water, the further out you will need to cast to find the fish, which is slightly obvious as they will be in deeper water, or at least water further away from the bank if it is open water. Shallow water might be okay if there's some amount of cover without many people about. Towards dusk, they will come closer in, in any case.



I constantly fidget with the baits. If I think something is interested but backing off, I just give the rod tip a tiny twitch, or reel in an inch or two. This has the effect of swinging the bait in the current. I noticed with those four perch at my feet. The moment I did this, all four moved together to follow the fish, shadowing it, then something within one of them triggered it to either jab at it or take it. If it was left alone to just idly lay or drift in the current, they would just sit and look at it and drift away. I think the fact that two or three fish together are around a bait, acting on it 'as one', at some point something needs to trigger a response. I am sure it is a sudden movement. That is why when a bait is shifted slightly, the take, when it comes, is violent, the rod sometimes nearly being dragged from your hand. If you just leave the rod to fish for itself, you could well have your bait surrounded by half a dozen semi-interested fish, but none of which are overly bothered with taking it. That is why sometimes a change from a tired bait, to a fresh one, will score instantly. Frequently, casting a fresh bait in exactly the same spot you've had a tired one in for, say five minutes, the bait will get taken almost the second the rod is in the rest.

Back to the 17th

Things were going well with a few obvious look-ins from perch and a couple of small ones of 8oz or so. Then a lovely take out in the middle of the pool with a cracking fish of 2lb 2oz.



A King's Weir 2lb 2oz Perch

The lovely plugging away of a big perch very distinct as to the old fluid lunges and reel screaming of a pike. A couple of run-ins with some small pike close in and fortunately the hook pulling out not giving me too much trouble. Bit later a mini-perch of about 4oz to a 3" perch, then the series of events, which had me unglued.



A longish cast out into the pool into a crescent of streamer weed had something obviously take an interest, the familiar jabbing on the tip, then nothing. A few turns of the handle, and a couple more jabs then I felt the bait pull into some weed. Cursing, I pulled a bit to free it, but it must've only provoked the fish to grab the bait as it took savagely. I struck and the rod pulled round. A shallow area of the pool, the water churned a deep furrow as the fish wanted more water over its head. The tip kept on thudding and thudding heavily and I knew it was a perch. Several times it boiled heavily, big circular chunky boils, I could see glimpses of a short fat shape as it curved back down to the bottom. As it neared, I could see big dark stripes and a big fat back, a last heavy turn and into the net. How sublime to be finding yourself saying, "three?" And yes, three pounds exactly.



Maurice Pledger with a 3lb King's Weir Perch

Lovingly photographed and returned, fresh bait caught, cast out, rod in rest, propped up. I walked two paces back to have a wee behind a bush, looked back only to see the rod tip jarring savagely over. Obviously taken on the drop, it was still curled over as I pulled into yet another heavy perch thudding away out in the pool. This one weighed 2lb 6oz. Usual thing, photos, new bait, cast out, same spot, bail arm over, bait settled. Rod tip lurched down as if hit by a sand bag. There was no need to strike. There was no time to even give line even if I wanted to wait to strike; this fish must've been laying there with its mouth wide open just waiting. If this was a perch, and I am as certain as I can be without exactly knowing, then this was a perch to end them all. The rod tip slammed over and stayed over, thudding solidly as it did, I think it thudded four or five times as I leant into it, a tremendous boil about thirty five yards out in the pool and it bore down into deeper water. I scrambled off my chair to gain as much height as I could and started winding down to the fish, turning it and started bringing it back towards me. Just as I'd brought it this way a couple of yards, the hook pulled. Frantically I put another bait out, thinking another big perch might be out there but got locked into a pike, the fight being totally different.

For the next couple of hours I was entertained by two more perch of 1lb 6oz each, a couple more smaller ones, a couple more pike and a few missed bites and a few bites which didn't follow through. I packed up earlier than I could have done, even though the perch were definitely well on the prowl. I'd quite simply had my fill.

Two perch over a pound, two over two pounds and a three pounder, plus hooking into one which I'm convinced would've weighed over four pounds, well, I mean.....

Mole.

Maurice Pledger