

Winter is on its way and you need to be prepared for it, says Tony Welch!



Hanging tough

The cold is starting to kick in now, the clocks have gone back an hour, and there have already been some harsh frosts. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it's only going to get worse! If you are planning to fish throughout the winter there are ways to keep motivated and of course be successful.

First, before you even consider the prospect of holding up a large common in the snow for the camera, you must remember carp fishing is supposed to be fun. If it's not enjoyable and you end up cold, wet and hungry, your motivation will hit rock bottom, enthusiasm will go out of the window and you will be looking at someone else holding up that common.

It's the same old story, but it's so true: you must have the right kit for the job in hand. I've seen mates really suffering under open-fronted shelters during the cold months. They had enough money for a bivvy, but were just too tight to spend it... you know who you are!

Also, simple things like a reliable stove and a hot-water bottle are carp fishing essentials in the cold.

Mental!

It's the mental side of winter fishing that truly sorts the men from the boys. Having the essential winter kit is one thing and without doubt makes a difference, but if your head is at home sitting in front of the fire, or you are suffering on the bank due to the cold and not thinking about your fishing, failure is soon on the cards. Commitment to what you want to achieve and determination to succeed are never more necessary than in the winter, but the fishing shouldn't be an endurance test.

Recently I was invited to get a winter ticket on a syndicate water with very few members – I immediately said yes. I needed a new water to get into and I was keen to get going. The only problem is the lake is just over four hours drive from my home, so it would have to be a minimum

two-night session to make the eight hours driving (and the 60-quid's worth of fuel) worth it. If I do ten sessions over the course of the winter it will be expensive, so in all honesty I'll probably only manage half that due to the costs. This lake could be classed as moderate to hard at the best of times so catching a carp from it with limited time over the winter is a real challenge – not counting the fact that I can only be there when I'm actually fishing. Coupled with this, the lake is full of weed, 35 acres and low stock. I will certainly need to be committed to get there, and determined when I am there.

I have managed a couple of sessions already as the ticket started in October. I did a two- and three-night session and they could not have been more different. I arrived at the lake in the second week of October, more for a feeler than anything else. There had been a nice southerly blowing most of the first week and a few fish out, but the wind had changed to an

easterly when I arrived. After a good look around in the boat I didn't see anything, so decided to set up in the middle of the lake and on the back of the wind. I got the baits dropped in on some clear spots and sat back to take it all in. I was still fishing blind really and blanked that night, so I decided to move into a likely looking bay for the second night. It was a tight swim with just enough room for three rods, although I decided to only fish two, one down the margin either side. There was a nice gravel slope so the baits were placed in close using the chest waders. That night I lost a fish at 2am and then landed a small common at 6am – I was off the mark at least.

Bitter

The second session was a whole different ball game with freezing northerly winds. It was absolutely bitter. I gave it my best shot but came away with a blank. My mental resolve was certainly tested as temperatures dropped well below



The move to a quiet bay (left) paid off with this small but lovely common



Winter essentials: the new Armo Power Stove and a hot-water bottle



I really didn't want to get into the boat, but I would have if I needed to

gh!

down 10mm Milky Toffee pop-up. I'm all ready and determined to get back to the syndicate now to put that freezing blank firmly to the back of my mind!

Tactics

There are some nice large areas of silt and gravel in the syndicate lake which are easily located from the bank. Some spots, however, are dustbin-lid-sized areas of gravel with thick weed surrounding them. These spots are only located with a boat and I then mark them with a Mini H-Blok. If you have not seen or used H-Blocs before they are basically an H-shaped float. Mono or braid is tied and then wound on to the Blok and a heavy lead is tied on to the other end of the line. As the boat drifts over a likely looking spot the H-Blok can be dropped off over the side. The lead peels line from the float as it falls to the lakebed and the float spins at the surface until the lead hits the bottom. Due to its shape the float stops spinning once the lead touches down and it sits perfectly on the surface. In the past I have messed around setting the depth with bits of cork and all sorts, but attempting to set the depth while holding a boat over a spot is near on impossible so the H-Blocs are used on the drift. I can then revisit the spot and have a good look around it, replacing the H-Blok with a very small, dark-coloured marker if I need to. I don't use the H-Blocs as permanent markers on this lake.

Due to the size of the lake it is odds on that over the course of the winter there will be some big winds to contend with. If I'm dropping baits on to spots from a boat, I want them to stay put in the winds and not move as I make my way back to the bank, so I am using 5oz Gardner flat pear inlines and 6oz Grappler leads set up drop-off style on short lead-cored leaders. That may sound a tad excessive but I

don't want to find myself in a situation where I can't present a bait properly on a particular spot. It all goes back to having the correct kit for the job in hand! It's bloody hard work, especially when four rods are utilised in this way.

Whatever tactics you are employing this winter, you have to really want to make it happen and putting in the extra effort can make all the difference.

Winter location

I have found in previous years the carp tend to hold up in certain areas of the lake and not move until spring, no matter what the weather does. Within these areas the feeding spells may be as short as an hour or so in every 24 so it's vital you find these areas and the times of the feeding spells. This will enhance your chances of success tenfold. A few years ago a mate and I fished a lake during the winter and had the zone sorted and the feeding spell down to two hours in every 24. A few anglers had a few fish over the winter by putting in fair amounts of time; we blanked once each and averaged two fish each during evening sessions and quick overnights... the proof is in the pudding!

FIVE TIPS FOR HANGING TOUGH

- 1 Make sure you are in the right frame of mind for those freezing night sessions and the challenge ahead.
- 2 Be determined to succeed, but also be realistic. No matter how much you want to succeed or how much angling skill you have, success is not guaranteed.
- 3 If you do find yourself broken by the venue or the weather during the winter, have a break for a week or so, or fish a less tricky lake. Don't burn out by going OTT. It's a fine line.
- 4 Use reliable kit to stay warm and dry. Remember, you aren't soft if you take a hot-water bottle, you're just smarter than the angler who doesn't!
- 5 Make sure it's enjoyable – if it's not, what are you doing there?



Left: Mainline's 10mm double strength and very buoyant pop ups – perfect for a multitude of presentations
Right: Mark your spots with ease using H-Blocs



As we now approach winter the weather can go either way; nice warm south-westerlies with heavy rain and temperatures still into double figures, or flat calm frosty nights when the temperature drops well below freezing. Make sure you have the kit and the mind set to see you through. Success is never guaranteed, but give it your best shot and enjoy it. Whatever your challenge is this winter good luck and hang tough!