

TYING TONY'S COMBI-RIG



1 Mount a hookbait on a short length of Vigilante braid



2 Knotless knot it to a size 8 Mugga hook



3 Form a loop in a length of Subterfuge fluorocarbon



4 Pass the braid through the loop



5 Pass the braid back through the loop



6 Draw tight to complete the Albright knot



7 Trim off the excess braid and fluorocarbon, and blob



8 Form a figure-of-eight loop knot at the other end of the fluorocarbon

WINTER BLUES

TONY LOOKS BACK TO THE HARSHNESS OF LAST WINTER AND HIS FIRST BIT OF CARP ACTION OF 2011

It's that time of year again, and here's me thinking the planet is supposed to be warming up! After the last few years let's see what happens this winter. It's been reasonably mild up to now, fingers crossed, and long may it continue.

The winter is generally about mind over matter and pulling out all the stops to make it happen. The first time I ventured out this year was to a large deep lake called Argal Reservoir on the South West lakes Trust ticket. I would say the fishing is medium difficulty in summer and harder in winter. I have known a few anglers who just won't fish because they suffer too many blanks, but this only leaves more free swims for those that do. I have fished Argal throughout the whole winter in previous years, but the last two winters have been so severe it's led me to look at venues with a greater chance of some action. Albeit, the Argal carp are some of the best in the land and it's always nice to get that winter thirty.

Being a large deep ressie it rarely freezes, which again makes

it a good winter option. However January and February 2011 was the first time I've ever seen the lake totally freeze over, although the big freeze didn't last as long here as it did in other parts of the country. I remember Paddy in the *Carp-Talk* office telling me it was -17°C where he was, which put my moaning about the temperature into perspective!

TODBER MANOR

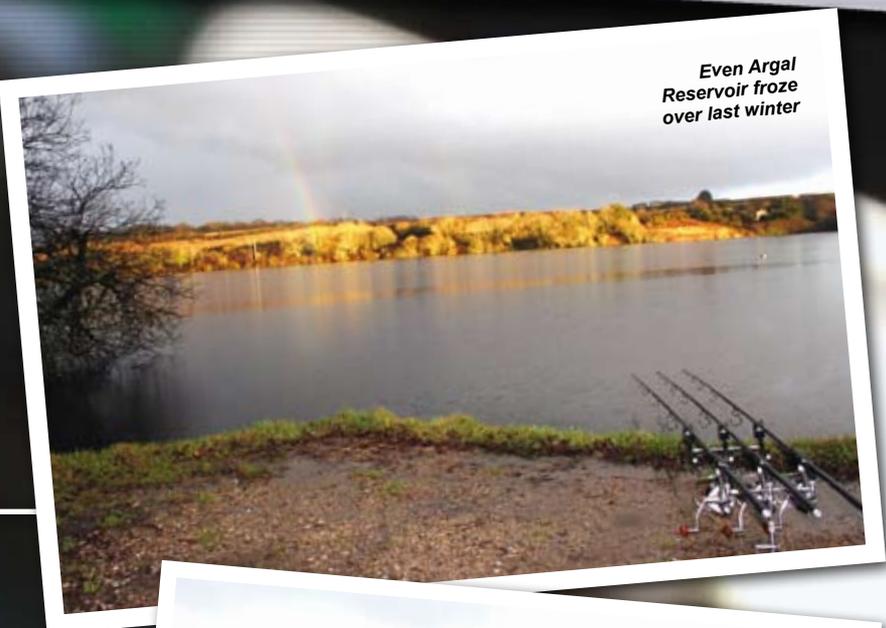
The next two-night session I had available came around and I checked the weather: it was -4°C ! I decided that this session I would go somewhere much smaller with a decent head of carp and a much better chance of getting a bend in the rod. I had a quick surf on the 'Net and Todber Manor in Dorset looked ideal for what I wanted. The only downside was the two-hour-plus drive from home.

Todber is a complex of small lakes, well stocked with some large carp, some of which are mid thirties, not much in the way of weed and fairly shallow. I guess this is about as good as it gets for

fishing in the cold weather. I popped into the tackle shop on arrival to sort out tickets and probe John the boss for all the info.

There was a match going on at the time with quite a few anglers on. This didn't inspire me with confidence but after having a walk around Big Hayes Lake and chatting with the lads it soon became apparent that they were mostly going about it using fluorescent pop-ups and small bags of pellet. Besides the locals, Rob Marsh and Lee Merritt were fishing the match and, when they packed up, I saw Lee throw a few handfuls of bait out in front of his swim. I wasn't going in behind him so it didn't make any difference to my plans and I thought no more of it.

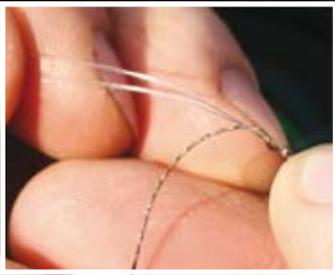
Later on that evening in the freezing, still conditions I heard what I thought was a carp roll over in the direction of Lee's swim, then another and another; in fact, I saw at least half a dozen proper shows right over the spot where Lee had thrown the bait in. The area wasn't out of casting range so a single hookbait was cast across the lake



Even Argal Reservoir froze over last winter



Todber Manor Big Hayes Lake



5 Whip the braid around the outside of the fluorocarbon



10 Mould a Critical Mass counterweight over the Albright knot

“The winter is generally about mind over matter and pulling out all the stops to make it happen”

Winter Blues

to the spot. I sat up until around 2am but didn't see any further shows. Had I spooked them with my single cast? Had the carp consumed Lee's bait and done the off? Who knows for sure, I didn't catch one but at least they were moving.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

The sun popped out the next day which saw me trying the zigs – black and whites, bumblebees, you name it I tried it – at different depths ranging from a foot to 3½ feet, all to no avail. The winter blues were creeping in! For that night I decided to stick with the lead clip set-up using a 3½oz Gardner flat pear lead. The bottom of Todber is 95% clay with the odd bit of bottom weed here and there. Because of this I could get away with a short hooklink, so as soon as a carp picked up the bait it would hit the lead and have no chance of getting away with it... Well that was the plan anyway!

I dropped the Covert Mugga hook size from an 8 to a 10. I then used Vigilante braid to tie the hair – make sure you have a supple section to give the hook plenty of

constant droplets up to the surface for a period of time. When you cast out using oils in stick mixes a flat spot will appear on the lake's surface where the oil is leaking from the bait. For a number of hours afterward if a fish is in the area of the hookbait and displaces water near it, the stick mix will release more of the oils contained and a further flat spot will appear on the surface alerting you to the carp's presence! The other liquids I added were Meta-Mino, a liver and amino complex that I have done well with in previous winters, and finally Multi-Stim, a feed inducer.

THE REEDS

There was a nice set of reeds approximately 180 yards to my left, and I had a clear line of sight to the centre of them. If the fish were not feeding directly in front of me in the open water, then perhaps they would be patrolling the reeds at the far end of the lake. My mate and I were the only anglers on so I decided to place a bait tight to these reeds. I was still fishing blind because I didn't see any fish in the area, but it looked a likely spot and was worth committing a rod to. I walked up the bank and got as



Tony's oily stick mix

close as I could to the reeds, then cast several times using the line clip on the reel to work my way tight to the reeds. I paced it out afterwards, in case a recast was required! All clipped up with the newly tied hooklink attached along with an oily stick, the rig was dispatched a foot off the centre of the reeds. As it hit the clip I felt the lead down with a decent thump. With the thought of the fish showing over the bait that Lee had thrown in, I walked around to the reeds and baited all the way along them with whole and chopped Cell, probably about a pound of bait. A bit risky in the conditions, as the going tactic was singles.

The rod was locked up tight due to the distance between it and

the reeds. Then during the night the ATTS box let out a few bleeps and I was in. Shortly afterwards I had a nice common in the net, which I sacked up to get a daylight snap.

Well that was the beginning of 2011 for me. Winter fishing is hard going at the best of times let alone with the weather we have endured across the country over the last two years. It was really hard going so lets hope the heavy frosts hold off. Tweaking your approach on an individual session as well as the whole winter will set you in good stead. Keep working at it. Todber was just the ticket for me on that session and I'm sure I'll be back for another go in 2012.



Left: Zigs are always worth a try
Below: A nice common banished the winter blues

movement. Using a knotless knot I went around the Mugga 12 times with the braid. Then I tied the braid to Subterfuge fluorocarbon using an Albright knot. You can add a short piece of shrink tube if you wish, but it's not essential, and a blob of Critical Mass over the knot to protect it and help pull the hook down. An overhand loop was then tied in the Subterfuge to finish off the rig. The hookbait was one of my balanced Mainline Cell winter specials, that being the going bait on the complex.

My oily stick mix consisted of Mainline Hemp and Tiger Stick Mixes, bloodworm pellets ground down to form a powder and ground Cell boilies. I place a lot of emphasis on the liquids here because it's predominantly the liquids that have the pulling power to entice a carp that perhaps isn't looking to feed into the area of the hookbait and then get it to actually feed when it's there. I loaded the bait with the Cell Hookbait Enhancement System as this liquid hugs the lake bed. I also added Hemp Oil, which doesn't solidify like fish oils and will disperse in



TOP WINTER WATER TIPS

- Go for a shallow venue so the afternoon sun can play its part
- Pick a water with a good stock
- Preferably a water with little weed
- Don't be afraid to tweak your approach
- Look out for a pattern in feeding times
- When all else fails, pack up, go home and watch a DVD!