ANDY LITTLE'S angling adventures

Follow the highs and lows of Andy's season in our exclusive weekly report. He's the country's top all-rounder with a flair for pulling off the impossible!
PICTURES: ROY WESTWOOD

Tench suck lobs for starters then pounce on paste

THIS WEEK: Bury Hill Fisheries, Dorking, Surrey

VENUE. Three heavily stocked lakes which will be joined by a freshly dug, big carp pool later this summer. The main Old Bury Hill Lake is around 12 acres. This season it has produced tench to 8 lb, carp over 25 lb, double-figure bream and 3 lb crucians.

ANDY'S AIM. He'll pursue the tench shoals from one of Bury Hill's fleet of traditional punts. Multiple bags are always on the cards with the chance of a 6 lb fish.

CONDITIONS. Sunny, calm morning and 15 degrees Centigrade. Atmospheric pressure remains high at 1,022 mb.

CAPABILITY BROWN showed that he knew a trick or two when he created Old Bury Hill Lake over 200 years ago.

It's a classic example of a lush English estate lake, surrounded by ancient trees and bustling with wildlife.

The clumps of lily pads and strands of dense reeds were redolent of early season tench fishing, and I had a great feeling of anticipation as I carefully paddled my punt through the plumes of early morning mist.

The Bury Hill boathouse harbours a dozen substantial punts, and they provide excellent fishing platforms from which you can explore parts of the lake inaccessible from the bank.

I glided up the jungle arm and quietly moored near a large fallen tree. The sunken woodwork attracts many of the Bury Hill species, but fishing tight against the jungle is certainly not for the faint-hearted!

I set up with a powerful 12.5 ft Fox Barbel float rod and 4 lb Maxima line straight through to the hook, to give me the best chance of dragging fish away from the snags.

To get the tench on the munch, I introduced six pouches of Richworth micro halibut pellets. I intended to ring the changes with hook baits to gauge their preference on the day. Lobworms, corn, marine pellets and paste were all on the menu.

In ideal conditions, you can get some serious bags of tench casting towards the trees from a punt. A few 100 lb catches have already been made and the cream of the sport is yet to come.

The tench average between 4 and 5 lb but there is always a chance of a six-pounder and they have been boated to just over 8 lb this year.

For good tackle control, I prefer a giant Crystal insert waggler. The main bulk shot is fixed about 6 in. above the hook with a single anchor shot 3 in. from the hook.

This bulk shotting makes it possible to swing the bait tight under the branches hook first, with the float following in afterwards.

A standard, loaded waggler flies the other way around with the bait trailing behind, and that leaves the float stranded just a few vital inches short of the snags in bright conditions.

The early morning mist soon evaporated and it was good to feel the strength of the sun on my back. Though I suspected it might prove hard going and the tench would take a lot of persuading to emerge from cover.

But in less than an hour I started to receive line bites, and needle bubbles burst on the surface right over my freebies. The first bait to be snaffled was half a lob nicked through the end of the tail on a

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Richworth pastes are a convenient change bait when the tench prove finicky. Andy moulded a fingernail sized piece of tutti frutti flavour around a size 14 hook.

The beauty of the Bury Hill punts is that they provide a stable fishing platform, even when a tench changes direction and does a full lap around the boat at high speed.

Andy returns his 5 lb 7 oz tench to the jungle swim, knowing that there are much bigger specimens hiding among the submerged branches of a fallen tree.

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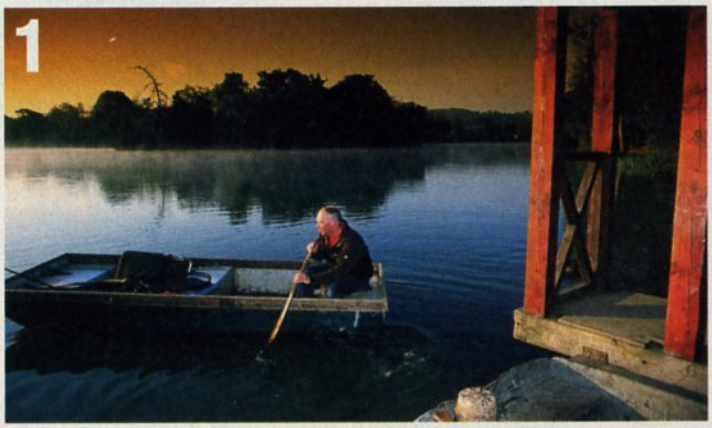


size 14 Fox carp feeder hook.

The anchor shot did its job perfectly as the float rose half an inch before vanishing. Then it was hit and hold tactics with the rod bent right over, to stop the tench reaching its sanctuary in the woodwork.

I slipped the net under a typical Bury Hill tench scaling 4 lb 4 oz, then tried corn without response and missed a bite on paste before going back on the worms.

It's fascinating how tench prefer one bait over another on certain days. They all work equally well in the long term, but one bait always has the edge.

The half lobworm produced another typical tench bite just as I'd put the rod down to catapult in more freebies. More halibut pellets went down my shirt than in the water, but I still managed to grab the rod in the nick of time.

This one pulled so hard that I could actually feel the boat tighten against the anchor as everything swung round towards the snag. Once I'd pulled it clear of danger, it dashed off in a completely different direction and seemed determined to do a circuit of the boat.

But once again my gear had the measure of it and at 5 lb 7 oz this was getting much nearer to my target six-pounder. The third fish of the morning was even closer at 5 lb 12 oz - and a manic male to boot.

I actually thought I had hooked a carp at first and feared the worst as it managed to get in among the branches.

But luck was on my side and I coaxed it out the same way in went in. Why the males fight harder than the females is puzzling. Perhaps it's those huge, scallop like pelvic fins that make all the difference.

As the day got brighter the bites started to slow and I needed to cast even tighter to the woodwork to create a chance.

A couple of bream and a perch fell to the lobworms, but after that I couldn't buy a bite at all.

I slightly repositioned the boat to drop the float in a hollow where I had spotted fizzes of bubbles coming up. Another six pouches of pellets suddenly started to receive some interest.

Although I was getting liners and there was plenty of fizzing, I still couldn't get a bite. I methodically went through all my baits, giving them about 20 minutes each.

When I got to the tutti frutti paste it was all systems go. They had switched from lobs without telling me! I could have sat there without another bite if I hadn't rung the changes.

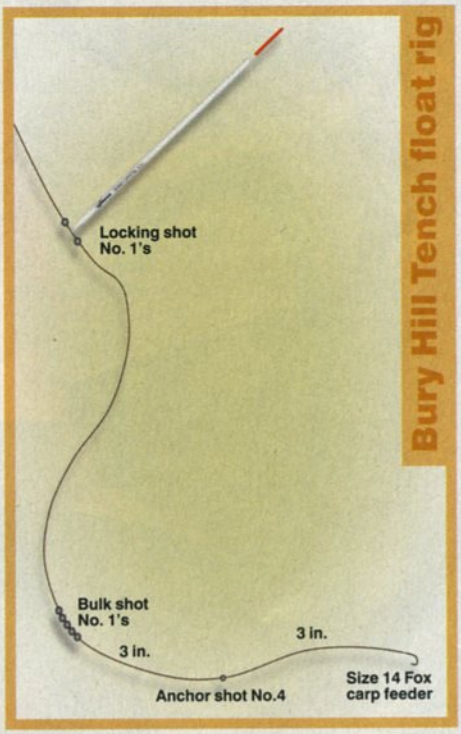
I had another four tench between 4 and 5 lb before the carp moved in. I pulled out of the first couple that I hooked as they tested the rig beyond its limit.

With more carp than tench in the bush, I changed to 6 lb line straight through and a heavier feeder rod. But I was on a hiding to nothing.

I managed to drag a decent double into open water only to have the hook pull under maximum pressure. I was cursing that I didn't take the carp gear with me as I could clearly see a couple of decent twenties foraging in the swim.

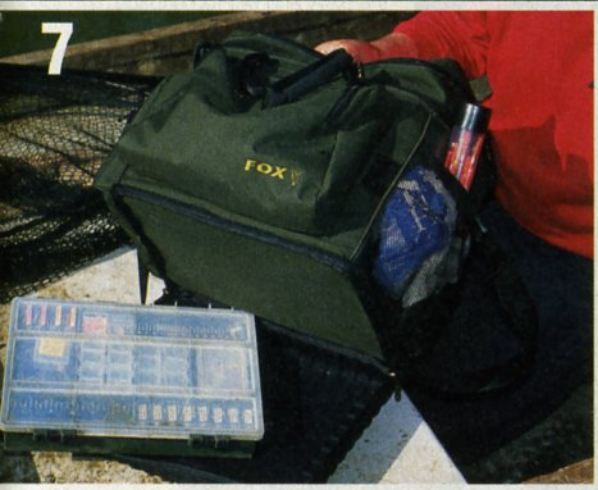
That's the problem in some respects at Bury Hill. There is so much to go for that you can easily get sidetracked. But in the end I decided to call it a day as I didn't think it was fair fishing for big carp with such inadequate gear.

It will probably be the reverse next time. I'll go kitted out with heavy carp rods and the swim will be full of tench. But I had had a cracking morning of action and really enjoyed my early season tench session from the punt.



BURY HILL TICKETS

Bury Hill Fishery lies west of Dorking towards Westcott on the A25. Fishing is from 7.30am to dusk with day tickets at £10 for one rod, £15 for two and an additional £5 per person in the boat. Contact the fishery office on 01306 877540.



PADDLING THROUGH THE MIST INTO TENCH COUNTRY

1. It's a classic tench morning at Old Bury Hill as Andy paddles out of the boathouse and prepares to glide down the lake, past the mist shrouded island towards the jungle zone.
2. Sweetcorn, soft marine pellets and Richworth micro halibut pellets are all readily accepted by Bury Hill tench, and it's best to take a variety as their tastes can change rapidly. Halibut pellets are used as groundbait with a couple of grains of corn or a single soft pellet on a size 14 as hook bait.
3. There's no more give in the rod. Andy applies maximum side strain on a double-figure carp which finally broke free.
4. A segment of lobworm proved the winning bait at the start of Andy's jungle session, then it was all change to tutti frutti paste.
5. The new big carp lake under construction in the meadow at the back of Old Bury Hill Lake. Owner Dave De Vere says he will stock it with London reservoir fish scaling from 20 to 40 lb. He aims to open the new lake as a members-only water in July.
6. Andy's run of tench fell fractionally short of his ambitious 6 lb target, but who'd complain about catching powerful fish of this stamp! There have been several 100 lb tench bags from the jungle already this season.
7. The new Fox Evolution bag has a zipped base designed to take a System Box. This gives instant access to all the rig bits without having to rummage through the main bag. The hard cover also doubles up as a tough base that raises the main unit a couple of inches off the ground.

Andy drags a powerful Bury Hill tench well clear of the fallen tree in the margins.