

EARLY SEASON WYE PIKING

by E-Sox Consultant, Steve Rowley



I don't usually fish the glorious River Wye until after Christmas, but being a little inquisitive by nature, I thought I would try an early season session, when conditions are very different to my normal mid winter trips.

As I peered over the fence, I was greeted with the lowest water levels I have ever seen on the Wye, and the water was so clear I could see the barbel flashing, which, while stunning, hardly filled me with pike fishing confidence. But ever the optimist, I convinced myself that the pike still had to live in these clear shallow waters, and they still had to feed throughout the year, so as long as I had a bait in the water, I was in with a chance.

BE MOBILE

My approach for the day was the same as any other day on the River Wye, travel light, and be mobile. The intention here, was to fish a float legered deadbait on one rod, and put the bait in every slack water available, working back from the heavy current crease, right in to the overhanging trees, spending no more than fifteen minutes in each spot. This mobile approach is often a good tactic, though it can be a bit tricky come mid winter when the high banks become treacherous, especially when trying to net a fish.

Martin Bowler always uses a spike and rope for that extra bit of safety when the banks get slippery, which can make more areas accessible, but it has to be done with great care. I have often worn a life jacket, just in case I go in. This might sound a little dramatic, but safety is a massive consideration when fishing parts of this potentially dangerous river.

STEALTH

Keeping quiet with a low profile is very important when fishing the backwaters, especially when the water is low and clear. I always try hard to move carefully on to the salmon cribs, keeping nice and low, as many of the pools are only six or seven feet deep, and slipping about on the rocks would be sure to spook any pike that were lying in wait.



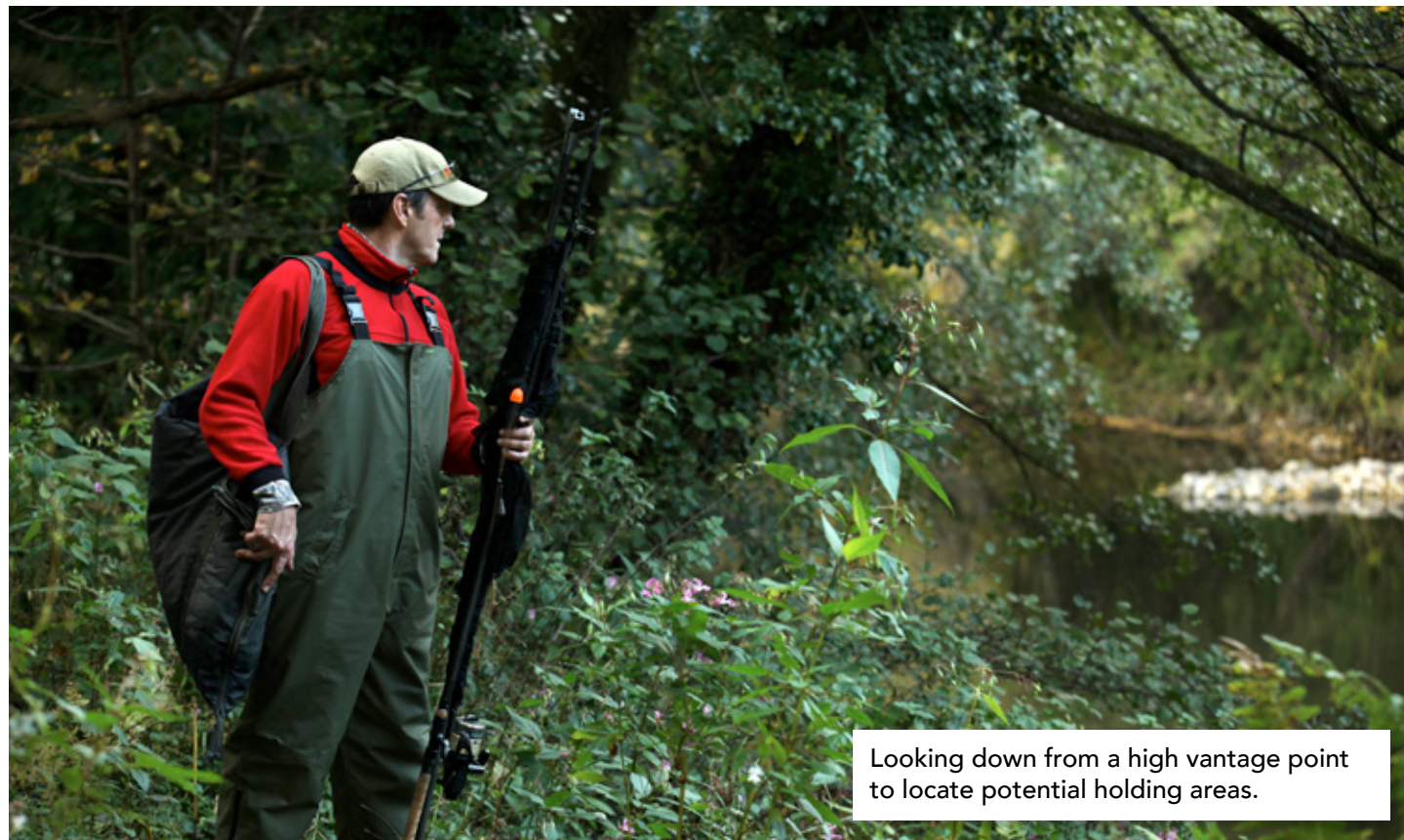
POWERFUL GEAR

I like to fish with powerful tackle on the Wye. It is famous for its rocky bottom, and you are highly likely to snag the rocks on more than one occasion, so you need to be prepared. The last thing I ever want to do is to have to pull for a break and leave a baited trace out there, so I set myself up with a powerful 12ft 3 1/2lb test curve E-Sox Pike Bait Rod rod, with 60lb E-Sox Pike braid, which are collectively powerful enough to straighten the hook out if I have to pull from a rocky snag. This happened to me twice during this particular visit, and unfortunately it can play a big part in the roving river piker's day.



THE RIG

It pays to keep things simple when fishing the River Wye, so I fish a very versatile rig, a simple float leger system. Working from the top down I start with a Powergum stop knot, followed by a small bead, then a 40g Drennan Pike float, which is then fished about a foot overdepth. My braid is then tied to a 24 inch up-trace, which acts as a safety measure should a pike grab the bait and swim through the braid, causing a bite-off. I then have my John Roberts boom sliding up and down the up-trace with a 2oz lead, this is then attached by a strong clip to the main 28lb 7 Strand Pike Wire trace, made up with two size 4 semi barbed E-Sox Extra Strong Trebles. Under normal fishing conditions these hooks are very strong, but if you have to pull seriously hard to get out of a snag, they will eventually open up enough to pull free.



Looking down from a high vantage point to locate potential holding areas.



A feisty jack pike taken just minutes after lowering the deadbait into a deep slack.

BAIT

For this trip I was using Horse Mackerel, which despite it's name is not a member of the mackerel family. Commonly known as Scad, this is a bait that I've done well with on the Wye, but I always add a syringe load of my favourite eel oil, as eel will be an important part of a Wye pike's diet. I'm not entirely sure whether this will make a difference, but I'll try anything for an edge?

FISH SAFETY

Fishing such a rocky environment is not only dangerous for the angler, but once we have a fish in the net, it is crucial that it's protected from any contact with the rocks whatsoever. The strongest advice I can offer in this feature, is to always carry a large unhooking mat. This is valid for any kind of pike fishing, but it is an absolute must when fishing the River Wye!



Inject your deadbait with your favourite additive. The scent trail will draw fish from downstream.

CHOOSING CONDITIONS

River conditions are absolutely vital for catching all kinds of species. Low, clear water levels are not ideal. Check out the Environment Agency website, which will show you the live river conditions. This is brilliant for monitoring rising and falling water levels, and if you have the luxury of choosing which day to fish, you can time it to perfection. If I could choose one set of conditions for fishing a river like this, it would be a dropping water level, which is losing it's colour, with a slight green tinge to it. If only these conditions arose more often!

THE RESULT

This particular trip proved to be very hard, but I did manage a couple of fish, two small jacks of around four to five pounds, one which came within the first five minutes, and then a lovely sixteen pounder came mid afternoon, which made my day. One thing is for sure, every small pike has a mother, so I will definitely be back when conditions are more favourable in January.