

Return To Locknaw Castle Loch, Scotland

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Finally we are experiencing some long awaited slightly-milder weather - the kind that normally arrives at Easter! The sort of weather that makes going fishing in spring pleasant. But this is a far cry from the sub-zero temperatures that have had a sustained grip on the British Isles for what seems

the longest winter I can remember. In fact up until very recently snow was still covering certain parts of the country. It was for that reason that my long awaited return trip to Lochnaw Castle Loch nearly had to be cancelled! Snow drifts, fallen trees, closed roads and advice from the weather man

nearly had me surrendering... HOWEVER when time on the bank is limited due to work and family life, sometimes you've just got to say "To hell with it!" and take what you can, when you can!

I was about to head north to the south west coast of Scotland to a lake that I'm





sure one day will cement its name in angling history, as the greatest British roach venue of all time. I believe its stocks of truly wild roach (which up until a year ago were virtually untouched) to be a slice of angling heaven. With so many big roach over 2lb and a huge head of 3's it seems only a matter of time before a 4lb fish is banked. It is for that reason myself, my trusty canine companion 'Monster' and my friend Laurence were all heading towards Lochnaw Castle at a rate of knots, totally oblivious to the surrounding blizzards and snow drifts. The thought of what could be landed during our forthcoming 3 day session lifted our spirits, we ignored the possibility that the lake could be frozen over, or that we might catch Pneumonia!

On arrival we were greeted by host and fishery manager Kev McArdle. Kev knows the lake like nobody else and his knowledge and ability to put us on the right track

is second to none. Over the next half hour we drank tea and plotted our first move - swim choice. To drive the best part of 4 hours and set up in the wrong area would definitely mean failure. With strong north-easterly winds and occasional heavy snow showers battering the lake we agreed the best option would be to fish off the back of it in a swim I'd not visited before - Stair Island. A lovely looking swim that allowed us to fish a vast amount of water. We had another island to the right of us but slightly out of casting range. There was a

large sheltered bay on our left and with being only 2 feet deep, we knew with freezing temperatures this wouldn't yield the big roach we were after. In open water right off the point we were standing on there was an average depth of 4 feet from 40 yards out and it was surprisingly clear of weed. Laurence would choose this area and I opted to fish on his right, towards the island. After ten minutes of plumbing up with the marker set up I discovered a channel that runs parallel to it, which is believed to be a patrol route for the Roach. It was a long cast of at least 75 yards but with the right tools for the task, I was happy I'd make the distance needed. The surrounding area was four feet, with the channel being slightly deeper at nearly two feet deep. This of course would be where I was going to concentrate my efforts with at least two rods.

Now that spot was marked and I'd clipped up, I wanted to fish a third rod somewhere in the margins. I'd just like to point out that when you know it's going to be tough and a blank could be on the cards,





it is best not to put all your eggs in one basket! A second swim gives you double the options and hopefully a better chance of a take. The margin rod would be placed about 25 yards out in three and a half feet of water over a very small patch of fine gravel. I would opt for a groundbait feeder on that rod and fill it with chopped worm + hemp.

After feeling a little pessimistic on arrival I was now feeling more confident by the minute. Sun was starting to shine, the snow and ice was beginning to melt and I had three days without a care in the world ahead of me! 'Lar' was chief boat handler this time so it was his job to walk up to the castle and grab the boat ready to ferry the mountain of tackle we had to our camp. By the time we had everything offloaded the temperature had risen to about 7c and

felt really pleasant. It was a small sun trap in our swim yet everywhere else was covered in snow. Bonus!

The afternoon passed quickly and with only 2 hours of sunlight left, the race was on to assemble the bivvy and set the 'traps' for the evening. My three Drennan Super Specialist Duo 12ft 1¼lb rods were all clipped up to their desired spots and the rigs (double hook rigs which I'd done well with on

previous trips to the lake) were tied to 6lb Supplex mainline. Hooklinks were 4 inches of 8lb Fluorocarbon (seems heavy but the stiffness of the line reduces tangles to a minimum) with size 16 Drennan Red Maggot hooks in red for the maggots, and 10 or 12 for worm hookbaits. In order to cast the distance I was using Drennan Feederbombs - a standard shaped maggot feeder would fall short of the mark. The unique design of



the Feederbomb ticks all the boxes! At 30g and with its special streamlined shape with the weight at the end, they cast true like a scud missile! One thing I like to do is tape the main body of the feeder with camo duct tape. Not only does this slow the escape rate of the maggots, but also gives the feeder a real camouflage makeover.

Last, but definitely not least I had to decide my baiting strategy. How was I going to attract a few monster roach and tempt them away from their usual diet of water shrimps and bloodworm? If I got it wrong on the first night and put in the wrong amount of particle and ground bait I would definitely blow my chances. The customers fishing on the weeks previously had caught very little and in fact, the last 2lb+ Roach was banked about 8 weeks previously, so I was faced with a slight dilemma.

Kev mentioned that most of the anglers had gone with the 'softly softly' approach, introducing the bare minimum of free offerings with long periods left between recasts. My thoughts were maybe they weren't putting enough scent in the water to trigger a feeding response.

After 5 minutes of pondering I decided to go "all or bust" and put 20 balls of my trusty 'Lochnaw magic-mix' groundbait into the gully. It consisted of 50/50 Sonubaits Supercrush Green and also Krill groundbait which if is a kind of cooked prawn colour. I balled the groundbait with a slight sprinkling of dead red maggots flavoured with liquid Pineapple ready for a dusk raid. My aim was to create a very tight area off fine attraction that wouldn't fill the fish, simply draw them in and keep them there. The feeders loaded with the live maggots would deliver the main consignment of

goodies! After the balls were catapulted into the lake I introduced four Spombs of very finely chopped dendra worms. Think of it as a 'exaggerated wedding cake'. The goundbait being the icing sugar, the chopped worm being the filling, and the feeder Maggots being the cherry on the top! I know which one I'd go for first if I were a Roach!

It was 6.30pm when I made my first cast of the evening and very keen fellow roach angler Scott Ashworth dropped in to share the 'craic' with us. As we were discussing the monster 3lb roach Scott caught in February, then the huge spring Tench hopefully to come, a large flank broke the surface right over my margin rod! "Crikey did you see that?" I exclaimed. The lake was now flat calm and in the low light conditions a series of rings could clearly be seen. "Trout" Lar said, but I wasn't





so sure...

Darkness descended fast and with it came the cold. It was bearable, but only just. At 9pm exactly the Swinger on the long range rod signalled a drop-back bite and the Delkim suddenly bleeped! We both looked in the direction and waited. Then slowly it started dropping! I leapt over the dog and lifted the rod; I was into my first 2013 Lochnaw Roach. I could tell from the onset it wasn't going to be my target fish of 2lb plus but still a very pleasing start in very cold conditions. The roach wasn't weighed but we agreed around 1lb 7oz about right. Apart from a tiddler of about three ounces that was to be all the action before we turned in for the night. At 4.30am I was in a deep sleep when my receiver let out a 'one-toner'! I panicked for a second – but a blinking swan had wiped

out my margin rod! Soon it was back in action and it being absolutely Baltic, so was I back in my sleeping bag! In fact I was so cold I didn't even recast the other rods until the morning.

It must have only 20 minutes later and my margin rod was away again – “not the Swan again” I prayed. The swinger was on the deck and the line limp - this was it! The carbon buckled and I was in to a powerful fish. “FISH ONNNNN” I shouted but Laurence the snoring wart hog didn't wake, so I was left to land it on my own. The hookhold was good and I could see it was on the bottom (double red maggot) hook. After a few heart stopping moments when she made a lunge or two for the bottom, she was eventually scooped up and mine. “GET IN THERE!!!” - I really was over the moon. Lar awoke

from his coma-like state and gladly helped with weighing. We both settled on a weight of 2lb 12oz - the huge Roach was placed in the Retention Tube ready for pictures at first light. As the sun was coming up our host Kev popped round for an early morning update and a cuppa - the smile on my face gave away the news he'd expected.

Surprisingly that was the end of the action for that morning. A lone fish passing through maybe? I wasn't complaining. The morning soon turned into afternoon and before we knew it an entire day had almost passed. It was 5.30pm and I was just making another 20 balls of the magic mix when my long range rod went off mental as line tore off the spool! The strike once again met with a force on the other end, and the head shaking knocks on the rod tip could mean only



one thing. This time I could enjoy the fight more as I could see what was going on. She rolled on the surface right at the point where the mainlines of the other two rods entered the water, and after a tense moment I steered the roach into the net. “Woooooo-hooooo!” Another beast of a roach was banked. This fish was fat but didn’t have the length of the earlier one, 2lb 9oz the confirmed weight. I was chuffed to bits! The pictures with sun going down really captured the moment of what fishing in winter is all about.

For the remainder of our trip the overnight temperatures plummeted significantly, down to minus 8 degrees.

This did nothing for our chances or the presentation of rigs and really depressed our chances of further success, although Lar redeemed himself with 5 smaller Roach to around 1lb 10oz.

Looking back, I think we did pretty damn good considering most would have battened down the hatches and waited for a thaw before going. By not following the usual trend and taking a gamble of really feeding I feel we winkled a few extra bites when some would have really struggled. The shortest day has now past and temperatures are set to get up to the high teens as Spring progresses. The roach will feed in earnest and begin to migrate to their spawning

grounds. I only hope I can get back up there before they do so!

*Simon ‘Busta’ Ashton
Durham, April 2013*