

▶ THAT'S THE SPOT!

It's way more important than having the "right look" – it's having a bait where they *just* have to pick it up...

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Ben Gratwicke and friends.

SAME SPOTS

"Hi there," I say to the angler who is busy casting out. "Any good?" I continue. "No" he says, "very quiet". I check out where he is casting and make a mental note. "You fishing?" He asks. "No, just looking." The conversation gets going and after a while we are both sat chatting about the lake in front of us.

The angler in question was on about the lake being flat as a pancake and silty with just the margins and the two islands as features. Apparently you could plumb all day and find very little if anything. "Like a bowl mate," he divulges in the areas he is fishing and explains that these are the spots you fish in this swim and anywhere else is a waste of time. "In The Bench Swim you fish out to that area, and The Trees Swim you fish



▲ A carp will know the lakebed like the back of its fin and we can only build a picture of what it's really like unless we drain the lake!

there, and 'The Big 'Un' gets caught here."

After a while I make my excuses, thank him for the tea and wander off around the rest of the lake. Knowing very little about the lake, I digest his words and sitting on one of the benches I watch the lake.

How many times have I had these type of conversations: this spot, that spot, "Old Lumpy only comes from here" and "Half Pec, No Eyes only gets caught here, and this area is good at this time of year and rubbish in the summer?"

So ask yourself this, what makes a good spot to fish? As I



have learnt many a time, the biggest feature on all lakes is the margins and I have yet to come across a lake where you cannot catch them from the edge. The margins are not only the ones you fish from, a margin can be that of an island or/and an area of restricted or no fishing such as out of bounds or nature reserve bank. Included on these margins are overhanging trees, bushes or reeds/vegetation.

On from that you have manmade features such as platforms, swim fronts, jetties, walls and in flows or outfalls. On the more natural side you have lillies, weedbeds, fallen or submerged

trees and tree roots. This is without the changing of contours of the lakebed such as bars, plateaus, silt banks, streambeds and all the other variations – the list is endless.

Now the areas we, as anglers, are interested in are the areas the fish go to when they want to feed or the areas where they will happily feed on anglers bait. Some areas or spots in a lake the fish just love to feed on and some you struggle to get a bite even when they're right in front of you. So what makes these spots more or less interesting for a carp to feed in?

▼ The same common from the same spot two years apart.



◀ I have yet to find a lake where you cannot catch them from the edge.





“Getting the spot just right is a different matter, and on some of these ultra pressured lakes it’s vital you are bang on...”

▲ Observation is one of the best ways of finding the right area.

If you can work out a guide to these area/spots then that’s part of the battle. Once you have found the part of the lake the fish are in or where they are going to turn up too in certain conditions then you can choose your bait position accordingly.

FINDING IT

Finding the right spot to position a bait can sometimes be very easy; for instance the end of a bar or island, a large set of pads or weedbed all these can give you a guide to where to fish. But getting the spot just right is a different matter and on some of these ultra pressured rock hard lakes it is vital you are bang on every time.

One of the best ways to find where your bait should be placed is by observing a fish feeding or the route a certain fish takes. Make sure you make a mental point of where it fed or swam. If you cannot do this as the lake is coloured or the areas are out in the lake, then by watching where the fish show and then a process of fishing and carefully moving

your hookbait around until you get the required result. This can take a while.

Using the slight changes in the lakebed can be a real winner such as a small hump, bar or depression and these can be investigated by a plumbing float, boat and bamboo cane or mask and snorkel (the latter is the business!). Most of the time if you cannot see what you’re fishing on, it’s a case of using a little common sense and carefully feeling your way around the swim. This is best done before the fish arrive, as if they are present you are likely to scare the crap out of ‘em!

Now a carp will feed off of most things, be it a gravelly spot, sand, weed and even manmade materials such as the odd fridge or sunken car, but they but they love to get their heads into the silt and their favourite is the type rich in food such as bloodworm or tubifex worms. In a lake or area of the lake that is very silty or a majority silt if you can find the spot with such treats buried in it then you’re onto a winner and one particular spot I found

A marker float can find those slight changes in the lakebed.



▲ If you can get out in a boat then perfect for spot location.



▲ Man-made features are often a good place to start.



▲ It all makes sense when there's no water!

on a lake was one such spot.

Having seen fish roll early one morning on this area which was about 20yds square, I cast a rig to it after the action had stopped to have a feel around it and on winding in after two or three casts there was a big fat bloodworm impaled on my size 8. Bingo!

Now the area in question was just slightly firmer than the surrounding lakebed and

and any light silt wash swept away by the activity of the fish feeding, therefore making the depth slightly more. By carefully baiting this area it became a real hot spot and I'm sure it was due to it being full of natural food the right silt and the added bonus of my bait being laid out as an after dinner treat.

The result was several of the lake's biggest residents over a

THE RIGHT STUFF

I have often found that the best features on any lake, even if it's a gravel pit, is the silty areas, but it has to be the right silt, and by this I mean the nice smelling silt not the horrible stinky black silt full of sticks, leaves and beer cans – the stuff that stains your lead and makes your hooklink stink.

You need to find the fresh smelling stuff, which is full of food, and to find this is often a process of elimination and watching where the fish like to feed or get caught. The other way is to use a gripper type lead and bring in a bit of this silt and have a good look and smell of it, or if you have access to a boat, get out there and if you can, have a prod around with a bamboo cane.

Now these are not the easiest to find, but can be very productive and as I have found, much overlooked as there is no

obvious casting reference such as an island, weed or snag! This in turn leaves areas less pressured and more productive.

I had an interesting conversation with Colin Davidson about a match angler who caught the majority of his bigger fish in the margins when fishing the heavily stocked match style waters and when he fished "out" he would catch far smaller fish. Having fished a particular water just down the road from my house which was fairly heavily stocked with a handful of big 'uns, I had a lot of fun getting three or four runs an hour on fish into double figures. Great for the first ten, then the novelty wears off as I was there to catch a bigger fish.

Okay, so how do you get around this? Well, my first thoughts were big baits and I am talking double 20s or 24s and as there were lots of fish in this lake I would put out a lot of bait and stick out two rods with big baits on. Well, the first night I tried this I caught six fish, all of the bigger

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slightly deeper. This conclusion I came to was because the fish foraged on it fairly regularly so it was kept nicely turned over

two-month period. This area was in the middle of nowhere on a lake that had very few mid-lake features and a pretty uniform depth.



“The fish would skip hundreds of yards of canal to feed in an area which to my eye was the same as the rest.”

canal both myself and a friend caught the same common from the same spot two years apart at the same time of year and when I fished the canal four years later, that particular common, which is now considerably larger, I saw on many occasions in the same area and in the same month. I am sure if I had wanted to catch it I may have been in with a very good idea where to place my hookbait!

Considering that the canal is eight-miles long, I very quickly learnt that you had to be so precise with where you fished as the fish would skip hundreds of yards of canal to feed in an area which to my eye was the same as the rest. Just like humans, maybe carp have their favourite eateries and after years in a lake the big 'uns know the best spots and what time of year to go to feed in them, whereas the young 'uns dart around feeding here, there and everywhere.

True on many big waters the carp will gather to spawn in one part of the lake or canal and once this is done they return back to their normal patch. Carp are creatures of habit and time and time again they turn up or get caught year in year out from the same feature. If you are after one particular fish, often a good way to find where it likes to feed is to look back over its past capture and more often than not a pattern will appear. Maybe not always the areas it likes to get caught in, but certain depths, features or times of year.

NEXT TIME

Next month I will be looking at the way in which fish feed on certain spots and how you have spots within spots. Mmmm, nice. I will also look at the behaviour of feeding between big and small fish. God my brain hurts!

Ben Gratwicke 



▲ Even on the bigger, low-stocked waters, bait placement is critical.

stamp and I only caught six instead of 20! But one method which was far easier, was to fish over a small handful of bait right in the margins and I mean right in the edge with my five-foot length of leadcore up the bank. Not all spots worked, but by spacing my rods along the bank I soon narrowed it down to a couple of top spots in a couple of areas in the lake. Not only where they explosive takes, but also I caught a much bigger stamp of fish.

So why is this the case? One

of the reason is the bigger fish are often the older fish and know feeding in the middle is a risky business and often by getting right in the edge in overlooked spots can yield spilt bait and easy pickings. They will often feel safe with the sanctuary of the overhanging bank, and more then often big fish are loners and don't hang around with the masses.

Big fish do have their habits and get caught in particular spots or areas and will avoid capture in others. On the Exeter