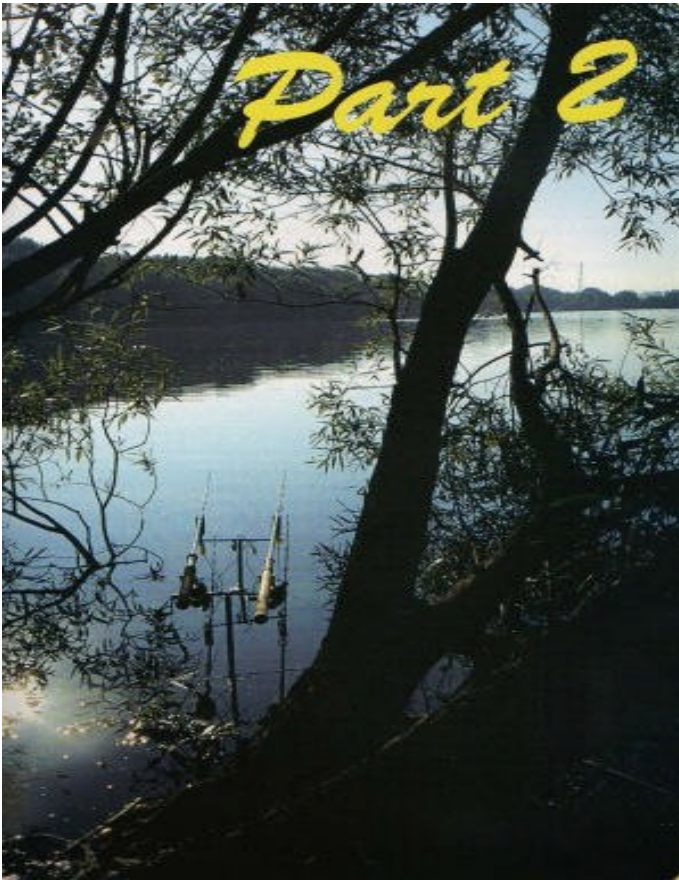


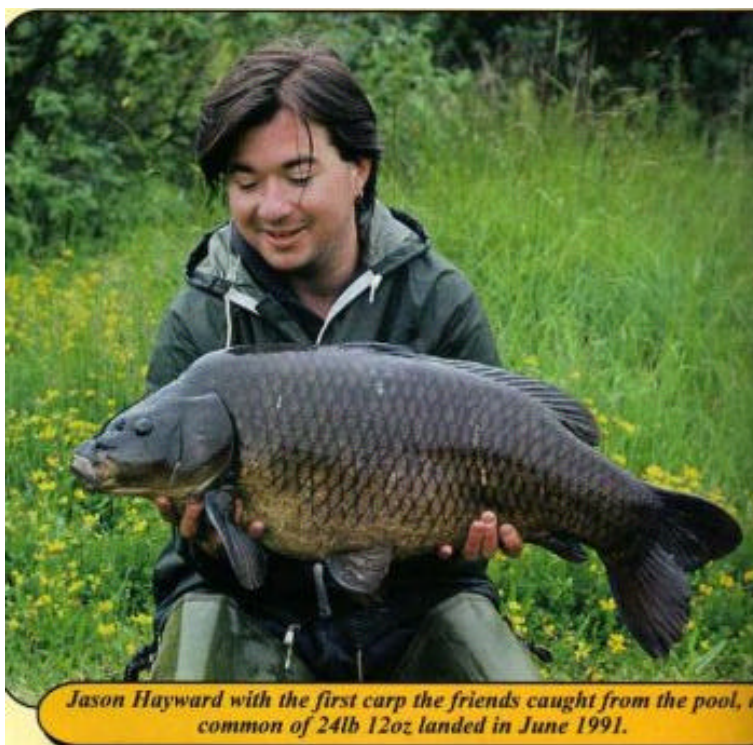
## Blackwater - Part 2 – The Black Hole



In the last article in this series I went through some of the history of Blackwater, whilst delving into my reasons for fishing there, and giving a brief insight into some of the problems we faced. When I say "we" I really mean Jason and myself, as apart from my final season when I fished there alone, it was with Jason that I spent most of my time fishing on the lake. The year is now 1991. The close season has ended and once again carp lakes are surrounded by bivvies. Except Blackwater (which hardly qualifies as a carp lake anyway). At the start of the 1991 season, though the water was open to all at that time, there were only 3 anglers fishing there. And I wasn't one of them. I had already made up my mind to fish for tench on a large gravel pit in the Colne Valley, and had been baiting a swim 3 times a week for the last 3 weeks of the close season. This worked wonders and I had a catch of fish, all on float tackle, which was far and away beyond the normal for this water.

On Blackwater Gary Bond and his brother had set up adjacent to some excellent features - gravel bars that ran close by a small point. I knew where they were going to go as for some weeks I had been coming across

their bait whilst diving. I don't blame them for going there either - it looked quite superb. Unfortunately, the fish didn't share their enthusiasm for these features. None of the bait ever got picked up. Gary got a bit excited at the time because he did notice that some of the bait had disappeared just before the start of the season. But as we were to find out, if the fish take your bait on Blackwater, they take all of it. If only some of it goes, you can bet it's tufties, or coots. Gary and his brother had planned to be there for, I think, the first week or ten days. I visited them on the afternoon of opening day, having tried to phone Gary the previous day. Too late, he was already on the lake. And too late for me to tell him that during a dive on the 14<sup>th</sup> June I'd noticed all his baits still intact from several days previously. This was the sort of confidence deflator that Gary didn't need and after a few frustrating days, he finished his session early. He did have a run though - a real screamer. A pike it was. I think his brother stuck it out a bit longer, but to no avail. I don't think either of them ever went back there. At this time Jason was set up on the far bank, and was down for the first fortnight. I can't go into detail about all of his catches, especially as I wasn't there when he caught most of them. I will however make mention of the fish he did catch. As I have said, on the day I visited Gary, Jason was somewhere on the other bank. It wasn't until some weeks later that we actually met up again and he was able to tell me what he had caught. At this time I had only spent 3 or 4 nights on the lake. Jason had, in the first fortnight caught 2 commons, one around 24lbs and the other about 14lbs.



*Jason Hayward with the first carp the friends caught from the pool, a common of 24lb 12oz landed in June 1991.*

A couple of weeks later he had had his first big fish, the carp we came to know as the linear. This was a superb fish - in my opinion the best fish in the lake. A long Leney type carp and weighing at that time 35.12. My first session on the lake was just prior to this capture, a one-nighter on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June. I fished on the end of a strong southerly wind. My diary records the bare details and I note I had a 4-inch lift at 3.45 a.m. Little did I know that this was to be the most significant thing that would happen to me there for months! The following weekend I was up at Birch Grove with Tim Paisley and my friend John Miles. Returning from that weekend I then had to attend a week-long training course in London. Sensibly I chose to travel by train, and coincidentally the train track at one point runs right by the side of Blackwater. So I had tantalising glimpses of the water twice a day. I knew I would be finishing the course early on Friday, so planned to spend Friday night on the lake. A good southerly had picked up on the Friday morning, and I had an idea that some of the fish would be on the end of it. Looking out from the train window on my return journey from the city I noticed a bright blue and yellow inflatable dinghy on the bank of the lake, right in the place I had planned to fish. By the side of it stood an angler, someone who I didn't recognise. On the basis of this I decided not to go. It later transpired that this was the very afternoon that Jason had caught the linear, and it was his boat I had seen from the train. The other angler was a friend of Jason's who had come down to take the photos.



*Jason with the first capture of the magnificent Linear in July when the fished weighed in at 35lb 12oz. He caught the same fish at the lesser weight of 33lb 4oz later that summer.*

My next trip was again a one-nighter, on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Again I fished on the end of a good southerly, and again nothing happened. I did however notice that the weed was growing extremely quickly, and clear spots were becoming increasingly difficult to find. Two days later I repeated the process. This was no good - I had somehow to negotiate more time. Nearly a month into the season, arguably the best month already behind me and I'd spent just 3 nights on the water. Also, I was beginning to lose confidence in my bait. I had been very successful in previous years using a mid-protein boillie with amino-based additives. I had felt very confident that the Blackwater fish would snap these up, that catching them on these 'advanced' baits would be like taking candy from a baby. But after fishing and baiting with them since the tail end of the close season, my diving trips had never indicated that the fish were actually eating any of them. Mostly they just rotted. In time I came to believe that the additives I was using were rendered ineffective by the very nature of Blackwater - a high PH and extremely rich lake. There was just too much natural food in there - too many natural signals. My baits just couldn't compete, and they certainly weren't going to pull carp into the swim from any distance away, something I had vaguely hoped they might do. Lesson learned - on waters like this you just can't make the fish come to you - you have to go and find them. This knowledge didn't stop me trying to attract fish into areas by various means, but I was never successful. It was time for a rethink. We were about to enter our sweet-corn period.

Sweet-corn has been an amazingly successful bait for all species, and a lovely bait to use - just open the can and there it is, no fuss, no cooking, no rolling. But by 1991 the carp in most lakes were very wary of it. Kevin had already used it extensively on Blackwater. But this was some years ago, and I hoped they might have forgotten it by now. I knew Jason had been pre-baiting with corn during the close season as I had seen clusters of it lying on the lake-bed as I swam around. It was around this time that I eventually bumped into him again. He was surprised that I hadn't yet caught a carp, as by this time he had caught three. Mind you, at that time I had done just 3 nights there - Jason had done around 20. It can make a difference. I think we were still a little wary of one another at that time, but eventually we got to talking about bait, and he told me he was using, and more to the point catching on, sweet-corn. Decision made - we would jointly bait with sweet-corn. We decided though that it was no good doing this by half measures - we wanted beds of bait that would almost leap up and

smack the carp in the face if they swam over it. So we began emptying the local supermarkets of their stocks. I got some really funny looks when I arrived at the check-out with a trolley full and over-flowing with nothing but tins and tins of corn. I also managed to negotiate more time on the lake and on the 19<sup>th</sup> July arrived equipped for a marathon 2-night session. Bait wise I was still hedging my bets and fishing peanuts on one of the three rods. Rigs were nothing special - fixed 2 or 3 ounce leads to a 12 inch braided hook-link, size 6 hooks and a short hair. They would be adjusted according to results. Of course, no fish and no pick-ups makes adjustments on that basis quite difficult, and I kept fiddling around with the rigs anyway. Funny - for all this fuss about rigs, in all the years I've fished for carp I can honestly say that, apart from the original hair, I don't remember a time when a change of rig made a dramatic difference to catches. It always seemed to me that bait was more important. Some of you won't agree with that, but it's what I have found. Back to the lake where a nice breeze was rippling into gravestone bay, so called because one of the bars there has a piece of stone that looks remarkably like a gravestone embedded in it. A furtive peek from halfway up an overhanging willow revealed three carp patrolling this margin. That was good enough for me - I didn't care a jot how big they were - I just wanted a Blackwater carp! There are some nice features close to the bank in this area. I baited all three rods, placed them in the rests then carefully climbed the tree again. The first 2 carp came in together, a big common accompanied by a moderately sized mirror. I estimated the common at mid-twenties, though this can be difficult with Blackwater commons as some of them are very long. (Apparently it can also be difficult with mirrors too - I heard that knowledgeable carp anglers had put the Black Mirror at 60lbs last season. It was caught at 48). Seconds later the third fish of the trio came trundling around the corner, another common of around 20lbs. They milled about beneath me for a minute or so before leaving together to resume their patrol. I took this opportunity to gently cast my baits, and scatter a few handfuls of corn and nuts in the area. It's handy when you can place the baits without any commotion as Blackwater carp are extremely spooky and the act of setting up in a swim can result in the fish leaving the area completely. If they do that, they sometimes don't come back for weeks! I didn't have weeks. For the remaining hours of daylight I sat in the cramped swim hardly daring to breathe. I resisted the almost overwhelming temptation to climb the tree again, in case I spooked the carp. The last time I had seen them they had swam away quite calmly so I didn't think they had seen me. Midnight came, then 1 o'clock.

I was reluctant to get into the sleeping bag as I was convinced I was going to get a take at any time. But eventually I had to give in, and crawled under the umbrella for a few hours sleep. I awoke at about 5 a.m., not as I had hoped to the sound of a buzzer, but to the extremely loud rantings of a reed-warbler. What a lovely song I thought, like you do, at five in the morning, after three hours kip and no carp. I was tempted to once again shin up the tree, but the angle of the early morning sun made it difficult for me to see into the water. Besides, this was prime feeding time and I thought it best not to disturb things for a while yet. The view from the tree at 10 a.m. was quite startling. No carp, and also no bait - save that was for three hook-baits, splendidly alone. Having spent much of my previous carp fishing on murky lakes where you weren't able to see into the water and presuming that no bleeps meant that no carp had been in the swim, this was quite a surprise. Not only had all the free-baits gone, but also half of the surrounding weed-bed had been demolished. The hook-baits didn't appear to have moved at all. Thoughtfully I climbed down from the tree and looked out across the lake. Way out in the middle, deep amongst beds of hair-grass a large carp rolled. I'm not sure, but I thought I saw it stick two fins up at me.

What to do now? There was no way I could reach the area where the carp had rolled, and even if I could I would have been reluctant to place a bait amongst the thick weed-beds. The boat hadn't yet arrived and I didn't reckon much on my chances of landing a fish from out there. At around midday I reeled in all the rods and went to look for some carp. Unsuccessfully though, and after a few hours I returned to my swim. It was getting quite hot by now so I decided to go for a swim. At the same time I thought I might also look for a clear spot a bit further out. I eventually found a nice looking gravel patch some fifty yards out, and about ten feet across. This looked really good. Treading water I took some bearings and swam back to get a marker. I didn't want to use a lead so attached the line to a stone. To the other end I tied a small cork from a wine bottle. Out I went again, but do you think I could find the spot again. No way! After swimming around for about twenty minutes I began to get tired and settled for a slightly smaller area, some ten yards closer in. I dropped the stone to the bottom and it immediately became detached from the line. Great - now I had nothing to anchor the small marker. So back in I went and spent some time looking for another stone. This took me ages - how come they don't make stones with holes in? After a while, and after getting many midge bites in the process, I found a dumb-bell shaped stone and attached the line to it. Swimming out some 50

yards, miraculously I came across the original clear spot again. Thank God for that. For the second time I dropped the stone and this time the line remained attached. I wrapped the excess line around the cork, tied it in a knot then swam back to the bank to get some bait. The long walks involved on Blackwater mean you keep your tackle to a minimum, and I didn't have any spodding equipment with me. If I wanted to get any bait out there I'd have to swim out with it. So how do you swim out with two opened tins of sweet-corn without spilling any of the precious juices? My solution to that problem was to swim out with the tins, then open them when I reached the marker. Great in theory. Out I went again, and I can tell you I was getting bloody knackered by now. Thirty yards, forty yards, fifty yards - where's that bloody marker gone? Sixty yards - it has to be around here somewhere. Perhaps I've gone past it. It took me another ten minutes to find the marker again, and bear in mind I was swimming round with a big tin of corn in each hand, and a tin-opener stuffed down my pants. Treading water by the side of the marker, I managed to open the first tin and deposit its contents on the clear area with no problems. Unfortunately, while opening the second tin, my foot became entangled around the marker line, and the cork disappeared. Also, once I'd opened the tin, the lid fell back inside. A small sliver still connected it to the top of the can, so tipping the tin upside down didn't work. I groped around with my fingers and managed to get the can fully opened, but in the process gave myself a very nasty cut and blood was now flowing freely into the water, and all over the bait. What a mess! Oh well, perhaps it might attract the carp - I know tench are attracted by blood. I dumped the rest of the contents of the can into the swim and struck out for the bank, this time with an empty can in each hand. Once back, dry, warm, elasto-plastered and recovered (and this was not a quick process) I faced another problem - I could no longer see the marker which had disappeared while I had been trying to open the second can of corn. What next? I had no option other than to swim out yet again and place another marker in the area. I suppose I could have cast around with a plumbing rod, but once the weed is up this is a very chancy business. Having gone through all that effort, in order to bait an area, I felt the least I could do was to put a hook-bait on it. So, making sure, I took out one of my biggest marker floats attached to a 4-ounce lead. No more hunting for stones with holes in! This time the area was easy to find as the bed of corn beamed up at me like a car headlamp through fog. I successfully dropped the marker and returned to the bank. Re-baiting each rod, I cast the first one at the marker. Would you believe it went in perfectly first time, and

I felt that reassuring thump as the lead landed on the gravel. The other two baits were again cast into the margins. It hasn't taken me long to tell you about these events, but you might be surprised to learn that to complete these manoeuvres actually took three and a half hours! Gratefully I slumped onto the bed-chair and hardly moved until the following morning. The purchase of that inflatable boat was coming closer. This had been my first brush with the Blackwater syndrome. There was much more to come.

Morning dawned, carp-less, and in the case of the further rod, bait-less also. I viewed this with some suspicion, but presumed it had come off as I had pulled it through the weed when reeling in. As you will see later, that presumption may have been a costly mistake. I climbed the tree to check on the margin baits before retrieving them. This time nothing had been touched. I was bugged if I was going to swim out to the other mark. I'd had enough. But it's typical of my attitude to Blackwater that before I was even halfway back to the car, I was already planning my next session

July 27<sup>th</sup>, and I was back for another two night session. This time I had a boat! But regarding that boat - Blackwater syndrome had already struck. The day I bought it I couldn't resist going down to the lake to try it out. I often went down there diving during the middle of the week, just to check on any baited areas, and the weed-growth, and sometimes to attempt to clear areas which I wanted to fish. I rarely saw any fish on these jaunts, and mostly the bait was lying there untouched, not just from a few days ago, but from several weeks ago. This time I decided to take the boat instead, and paddle around in it viewing the lakebed through my diving mask. This worked very well, and I'd spent a happy hour or so floating about with my head in the water. This was great - I didn't even have to get changed into my swimming gear - what luxury. Then I saw a carp - a huge common! Have you ever tried to say "Jesus" with your head under water and a snorkel in your mouth? I can tell you it doesn't come out right at all! Anyway, the carp swam by me, and went under the boat. Instinctively I leaned over to watch it go past, and unwittingly tipped the boat past its point of balance. It completely upended, depositing me, fully clothed into the lake. I'm a strong swimmer so was not unduly worried by being pitched into the water. But once I got back to the bank, I soon realised how heavy tracksuit bottoms are when they are wet. And I also realised, as I made my way back to the car with my trousers fighting to get around my ankles, how ineffective elastic waist bands are for holding up sopping wet tracksuits.

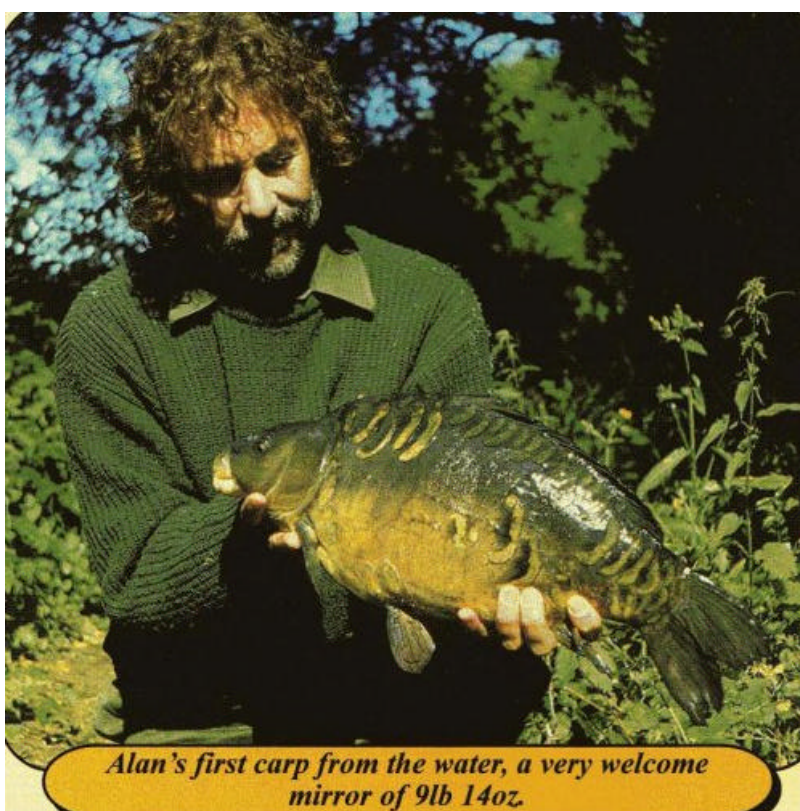
It was a baking hot Thursday evening when I next arrived at the lake to fish, intending to stay until Saturday morning. I hardly need say that as usual, I arrived in the swim soaked in sweat & blood and cut, scratched and stung to pieces. The only fish I had been able to find were once again out in the middle in the thick weed-beds. Once this weed comes right up and the weather gets warm, the carp spend an awful lot of their time in this area, and they are virtually unapproachable there. It was a long way from the bank we were fishing, and the other bank was by now totally overgrown. Whilst you could, at a push, manage a fifty yard chuck from the bank here, there was not enough room for the full blooded swing required to get a bait a hundred yards or more. The best we could do was to set up near to the carp and hope a few would go on a swim-about at some stage. I set up in a swim adjacent to the one I had last fished, but about ten yards further along the bank. This gave me casting access to the clear spot I had fished the previous week, though this area was still a good fifty yards short of where the fish had recently been showing. Two rods would be cast to this area, and the other would be placed in the margins. With the aid of my new boat baiting up was simplicity itself, especially as the marker was still out there. I was slightly encouraged by the fact that I couldn't see any of last week's bait on the bottom, though after a week it is sometimes difficult to see sweet-corn. I set up the bivvy and when I had stopped sweating from my efforts, gave myself a liberal dousing in fly repellent. As usual the night and the following day passed beep-less. Jason arrived on Friday evening and set up in a swim about forty yards to my left. This put him in as close a position as he could get to the fish. Like me, he concentrated his baits in the clear areas to which he could cast, areas that were relatively close to the bank, and a long way from the fish. For the remainder of that week-end, and the whole of the following one we baked in the August sun, sitting in the same swims, and watching the carp roll far out in the lake while our baits remained untouched. By the middle of August I'd had enough of this. After yet another blank night I decided I was going to go and look for clear areas nearer to where the fish were. Jason agreed with me, and by midday we were both drifting around in our inflatables with our heads in the water. It wasn't long before I had found two superb looking areas about sixty and seventy yards from the bank, clear gravel humps about six feet down and surrounded by slightly deeper and weedy water. You couldn't have asked for better looking spots. I dropped markers on both and went back to shore to get some bait. Meanwhile Jason was having a difficult time - the only clear spot he

managed to find was a rather murky looking black hole of about a square foot in the middle of some silkweed. Compared to the areas I had found it didn't look very inspiring at all. Never-the-less, in the absence of anything better, Jason decided to persevere with it, and dropped down a marker before baiting heavily with the corn. I'm loosing track of time a bit here, but I know all of the following took place in August. After finding and baiting these new areas (we used the boats to drop the baits as there was not enough bank-space to cast) we fished them for the remainder of the weekend. Again nothing happened, but we felt if the warm weather continued, then in subsequent weeks we would be in with a chance. Next weekend we were both back and soon had the baits in place. On the first morning I was awakened at around 4 a.m. by Jason shouting. Funny though - it seemed to be coming from the middle of the lake. I peered out and there was Jason, about 70 yards away, kneeling in his boat with his rod bent double and shouting wildly for assistance. I scrambled from under my sleeping bag and checking my boat was still sufficiently inflated, cast off and paddled quickly towards him. Pulling alongside I lashed our two boats together with my anchor rope. It was obviously a big fish, and the boats spun continually as Jason played it. Before it was in the net he recognised it as the linear. I netted it for him and side by side we rowed back to shore to take pictures. Having lost some of the spawn it had been carrying earlier in the season it now weighed 33.4. The fish was carefully returned, and Jason rowed back out to replace his baits. When he came back he came into my swim for a cup of tea and told me what he had seen. Apparently the small clear area, which we subsequently came to call the "Black Hole", had increased in size from one square foot to about five square yards as the fish had torn up the weed to get at the bait. By the end of the month Jason had landed a 14lb common, and lost two other fish from this area. And by that time the size of the clear area had increased to almost half the size of a tennis court. During this period the baits on my "superb" clear spots remained untouched. In fact, the carp only visited my areas once. Jason saw them, going berserk over one of my baited areas. Unfortunately I was at work at the time. They never came back. There were some lighter moments during that period. The first when, knowing how keen Jason was to fish the Black hole, I arrived before him and set up a spare brolly in his swim. During the afternoon I heard the unmistakable sound of anglers coming along the path. Then there was silence for a moment as they stopped behind the umbrella, followed by an exasperated "Someone's in the swim!". It was nearly ten minutes before a sweaty face peered around my bivvy and said

simply "You bastard!". A week later he got his own back. During mid-afternoon I had a run on my margin rod which I'd cast close in and parallel to the bank on my left. It felt like a big fish, but was fighting in a strange manner, and seemed to have gone around the corner into the bay. I was using 15lb line so put the pressure on. After a lot of tugging around the corner came a hysterical Jason in his boat, my line wrapped around his hand!

September 7<sup>th</sup>. The weather had broken and at last we were getting some fresh winds. I'd had my eye on a swim for some time, but this was the first time the conditions had seemed right to fish it. The tactic I had adopted at this time was to bait as many areas as I practically could, then the evening before I fished, swim out and check them all. If bait had gone from an area, then that was where I would fish. If the bait had gone from two areas then that would put me in a bit of a quandary. In the event, bait hardly ever went from anywhere at all, which made things decidedly difficult. It doesn't do much for your confidence fishing over baits that have lain untouched for a week. But on this occasion, one of the swims had been cleaned up. Also, on my swimming visit the previous evening I had seen a carp roll in the vicinity. So I set up in this new swim, a swim which later came to be known as "My" swim (or by Jason as "Your" swim!). While I did use the boat to put the particles out, it was a relief to be able to cast all the baits. Two went into clear areas about twenty yards out, while the third was cast some 40 yards into a larger and slightly deeper area. Nothing happened overnight, but at 9 a.m. the following morning I saw a carp jump about 100 yards past the furthest bait. Half an hour later it jumped again, on the same line, but this time thirty yards nearer. Another half-hour went by, and out it came again, this time only thirty yards from the baits. It seemed to be working its way towards me. Regular as clockwork, thirty minutes later it jumped right over the baits, and five minutes after that I had a single bleep on the middle rod, the top knocked slightly to one side, then straightened. I suspected that my line had been hit by the small fry cruising along the margins, but kept an eye on the rod top just in case. A few minutes later the top started knocking again. I grabbed the rod, struck and, lo and behold, there was a carp on the end. I played it for a while, very carefully I can tell you, but after a few minutes it became stuck in a weed-bed. There wasn't any serious weed in front of me, but you can bet I wasn't going to take any chances with my first Blackwater carp. Grabbing the landing net, I hopped into my dinghy and wound myself out to where the fish was sulking. Once I got above it, it came out quite easily

and I soon had it in the net. Not a big fish, in fact a small fish - a prettily scaled mirror of 9lbs 14oz. My first Blackwater carp! I quickly paddled ashore and Jason came around to congratulate me and take some photographs. Despite the size of this fish I can tell you that much air punching followed. For anyone interested, the rig was quite simple - a 4-ounce fixed dumpy lead, 12 inch Merlin 15lb hook-link to a Drennan Super Specialist 4. Bait was 3 grains of corn and a piece of yellow rig foam on a short dental floss hair. I re-baited and re-cast, but had no further action. I packed up at 9 a.m. on the following morning. I did suspect that other fish were about and it may have been partly due to the discovery I made on September 27<sup>th</sup> that I had no other takes.



*Alan's first carp from the water, a very welcome mirror of 9lb 14oz.*

It was two weeks before I returned to Blackwater, and with hindsight, that was a mistake. My swim had started to produce, and I should have taken full advantage of it - too late now. On the 18<sup>th</sup> September I went diving to check on the bait I had put in a day earlier. It had all gone. The next evening I arrived for a two-nighter. As I set up I saw two or three fish rolling between thirty and a hundred yards from the baited area. I settled down for the night feeling very confident. But morning dawned, and again all was quiet. The day became very hot indeed, and passed by very slowly. With the cooling of the evening my hopes rose once again. Just before dark I reeled in all the baits and checked them before re-casting. I now had two rods fishing in the further area and I was again

surprised to find no bait on either of these. I re-baited and re-cast, but after a second quiet night, once again I reeled in to find the baits gone. But still the penny hadn't dropped. At a quarter past four that afternoon the margin rod screamed off. A bigger fish this time, and a good tussle in and out of the weed-beds. No need for the boat though, and it wasn't too long before my second Blackwater carp was slipping over the net - a lovely sleek common rather over-estimated at around 24lbs by Jason. In fact it weighed 19lbs 14oz. Curiously it had a perfectly neat hole in its dorsal fin, about an eighth of an inch in diameter. It looked like it had been made with a leather punch. We caught at least one other common with this marking. I'd be interested to know who did that. Before re-casting this rod I went out in the boat to see how much bait was left in the swim. I'd put three cans of corn in - it had all gone.



September 26<sup>th</sup> and I was back in the same swim. Of course! The bait I was putting in was still disappearing, but that evening I arrived to find forty or so very grateful looking tufties sitting on the far

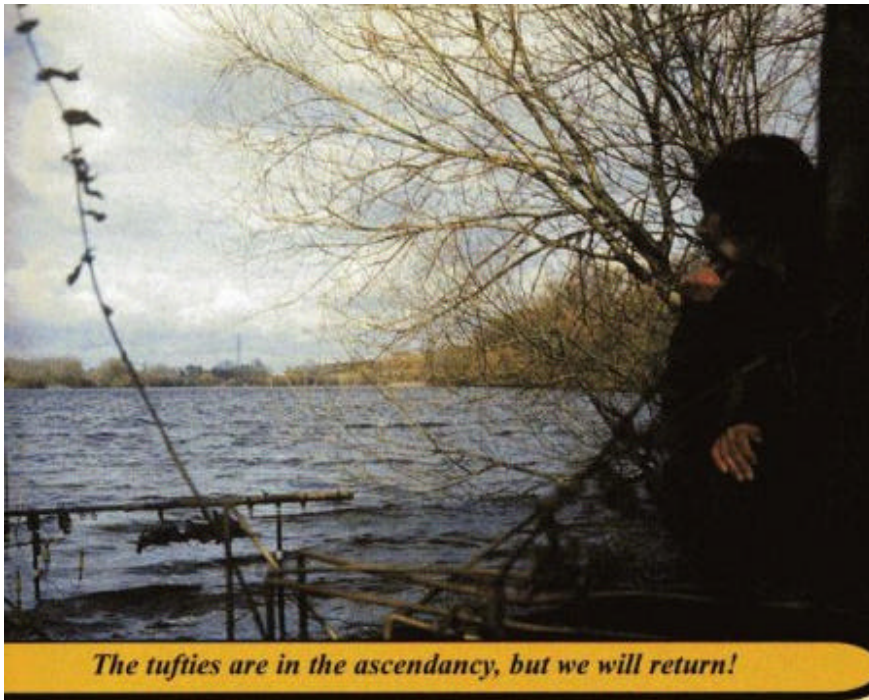
mark. I shooed them off and cast two rods out there. At 7 p.m. a carp rolled over the far baits, and two hours later the buzzer let out its now familiar shriek. I struck into a fast moving fish that felt to have a good deal of power. For half a minute I attempted to control its rapid flight - then the hook pulled out. I can't remember exactly what I said but I doubt if it was complimentary. I re-baited, re-cast and settled in for the night. I was up early and checking the baits the following morning. Both the baits on the far rods had gone. This time I was more than suspicious and conducted a few experiments. From these I discovered that the corn was smashing off the hair as the bait hit the water, and I had spent most of my time fishing the far area with nothing more than pieces of rig foam! I reckon that the two pick-ups I'd had from there were both on rig foam and nothing else. O.K. - so it worked, but I'd feel much better having some bait on the hair! So I began tying up my hook-baits in little PVA parcels and this worked very well. I had a feeling though that I'd missed some opportunities... It took me quite a while to get all this done, and ten minutes after I'd settled down a floating weed-bed the size of a taxi came down the lake and took all the lines with it. To make matters more difficult, the far marker had disappeared, and I had to guess where to cast the baits. It was 11 a.m. by the time I'd sorted that lot out. Blackwater letting me know I wasn't going to have everything my own way...

I continued to fish the lake on and off until the middle of November. Bait continued to disappear from my swim, but some of this may have been due to the reinforcement of the original band of tufties by hundreds more. Blackwater is an important site for migratory ducks and holds thousands of them during the winter. I did see carp rolling over the baited area on a regular basis, regular being of course a relative term so far as Blackwater is concerned. But despite fiddling about with the rigs I only had two more runs. The first, at around midnight on 11th October, was from a double figure common - a fish of 15lbs 11oz. This fish had recently suffered quite a nasty injury and we suspected it had been hit by a jet-ski as these infernal devices had been on the lake during the autumn.



*Last fish of the summer/autumn stint, the common of 15lb 11oz which looked to have been damaged by a jet-skier.*

By now I'd changed the rigs slightly. Having had a few aborted beeps on the 12-inch hook-links I had shortened them to 8 inches, and this seemed to be about right. Then on October 18<sup>th</sup> I had a belting run which stopped when I picked up the rod. I struck it anyway, and something very heavy charged off up the lake, at which point the line, almost new 12lb Big Game, snapped. The following night I caught a tuftie. Returning on November 16<sup>th</sup> I caught another one. That was enough for me and I went off pike fishing for the winter.



*The tufties are in the ascendancy, but we will return!*

Alan Tomkins - 1997

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