



SIMON MARLOW

Angling on the K.S.A.
It's easy to adapt your
technique to fishing
from a moored boat.

NEW ANGLES

Andy Wedgbury, IWA's Navigation Committee angling rep. explores the history of fishing and how to take up the relaxing hobby on our inland waterways

Since at least the 15th century, angling has been a popular pastime in the UK. It is not surprising, considering the array of different environments and fish species for the angler to test his or her skills against on our inland waterways.

For many years, it was thought that England was the birthplace of angling but more recent research seems to suggest that it developed from subsistence fishing independently in several different locations throughout Europe in or around the 13th century. It might have remained an oddity sport practised by a few wealthy individuals if it was not for the construction of the canal system across the UK during the Industrial Revolution. Pioneering manufacturers used the waterways network for transport, while fish began to colonise our newly constructed canals. These polluted waters were arguably not ideal for our finned friends, but were ripe for creating a new British obsession: coarse fishing.

The Industrial Revolution brought with it crowds of people. For the first time, the centres of productivity moved from the rural environment into the growing cities. Factories needed hands and the increasing need for labour brought people to where they could, relatively easily, find work. With them, they brought their traditional country pursuits, which, like bull baiting, dog fighting, heavy drinking and the ensuing drunken brawls, could be violent. Large numbers of people focused in relatively small areas amplified the problem and concern grew among wealthy factory owners about their employees' recreational activities of choice. The rapidly growing canal system presented a solution.

COARSE FISHING

Men (women were excluded) were encouraged to fish in the canals, not for food, but for leisure. The polluted nature of canals meant that fish that could cope with lower oxygen concentrations thrived and, for the first time, a division occurred between species. 'Coarse fish', which, on the whole, belong to the same family as carp, survive in polluted waters, while trout and 'game' fish require much cleaner environments. It's an interesting footnote of social history that the class divide between coarse and game anglers first occurred as the wealthy could afford to travel to fresher waters. Today, of course, that divide has largely dissolved and fishing of all types has become more open and accessible to all.

The canal system is no longer the centre of industrial transport that it once was and instead the network has taken on a second life as a place for recreation. People flock to the canals, not for transport of goods but to cycle, walk, enjoy holidays and, of course, to fish! It's difficult to imagine the motorways, which are vital to the transport of goods today, having a similar second life when they eventually, and perhaps inevitably, fall out of use.



You must obtain permission from the landowner to fish on the inland waterways.



JAN WARSOP

Fishing from the well deck on the Chesterfield Canal.



Angling for leisure has been a popular activity since the Industrial Revolution.

LAWS AND LICENCES

I have spent the best part of my life angling and studying the sport as an amateur and now as a fully funded PhD candidate with the University of Worcester. My interests stretch beyond the fish themselves, to the people who catch them. This wide-ranging leisure activity can include dedicated, regular anglers, those who only fish occasionally, and people who have become interested in angling through their passion for canals and boating.

Angling is an inclusive hobby that is easy to pick up but there are a few legal requirements to be aware of before you catch your first fish. Firstly, and most importantly, everyone fishing in freshwater in England and Wales needs an Environment Agency fishing licence. Traditionally called a rod licence, it allows you to use a rod and line but does not give you permission to fish in any waters.

All water in the UK belongs to someone and you need to obtain consent from the owner of the fishing rights in order to angle there. What does this mean in practice? Organisations like Canal & River Trust lease the fishing rights to much of its network to private fishing clubs; these clubs usually, but not always, offer day tickets to visiting anglers. Water keepers may walk the towpath looking for people who are fishing and collect day ticket fees – don't assume this is the case, though. If you're unsure, contact the club in advance to find out. Some clubs are less active in enforcing their rights, or don't sell day tickets. You may need to research who owns the fishing rights to the stretch of canal where you intend to fish before heading out.

ANGLING FROM A BOAT

It's important to remember that even if you are angling from your boat, you still need a licence. Also, it should be noted that fishing should not take place from a boat in a 'no fishing' area. Furthermore, fishing must not take place from a moving craft on the canal network, so you must moor up before you start angling.

You might already be a keen angler, in which case it is easy to adapt your methods so you can fish from your boat. As you will be moored, a short rod would probably be most useful. Fish love to shelter beneath boats so if you have been moored for more than half a day, right under your boat is going to be the perfect place to start. Just drop your bait over the edge and expect to catch an array of fish from carp to zander and everything in between (depending on the

bait and method you are using, of course).

What if you don't know how to fish? Angling is simple, but it can be helpful to have a few pointers before you get started. There are some useful resources online, including information about angling law, and many clubs will offer taster sessions. Then it's just a matter of getting out there and catching some fish.

Despite its long history, fishing has undeniably been in decline for the past decade. We need more people to take up our fine hobby so, by having a go, you will be helping to maintain an important part of British culture.

USEFUL LINKS

- IWA angling briefing notes: waterways.org.uk/waterways/activities/angling
- Angling Trust: anglingtrust.net
- Canal & River Trust: canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/fishing
- Environment Agency fishing licence: gov.uk/fishing-licences