

CRACK THE CODE

Tackling a new venue is always exciting, but figuring out the key tactics on your first visit can be very tricky. We joined Frenzee and Bait-Tech ace **Andy Oldham** at Lake John, in Essex, where he planned to crack the code in just a few hours!

ANGLER FILE

ANDY OLDHAM
Age: 50
Lives: Maltby
Sponsors: Frenzee, Bait-Tech
Pole: Frenzee FXT Precision

VENUE FILE

LAKE JOHN FISHERY
Location: Galley Hill, Waltham Abbey
EN9 2BJ
Day tickets: £10; concessions £6
Contact: Colin on 07985 938153
Web: www.lakejohnfishery.co.uk

What, where, and when? As I'm eagerly unloading my tackle in the car park of Lake John, these words are whizzing through my head! I love travelling to a new venue, not only because I enjoy new scenery, but also because I thrive on the challenge of mastering an expanse of water that I've never seen before!

Whether you're a pleasure angler, a club angler, or a serious match angler, the satisfaction you can get from working out effective tactics on a new venue is great. Here's my way of going about it...

TARGET SPECIES

The first thing to try and establish is what fish I'm targeting. It may sound simple, but one of the best ways to do this is to get an idea before you get to the bank. I often check fishery websites, or give the fishery a ring to find out.

After calling Lake John, I was delighted to talk to the venue owner, Colin Bartlett. He informed me that the lake was densely stocked with skimmers and bream, as well as a very healthy head of silver fish, including roach, hybrids, rudd and tench – it sounded like heaven.

I also discovered the lake had a head of rather large carp. In fact, the biggest that has been caught on the pole is over 40lb, and fish over 20lb are regularly banked! However, it soon became obvious that these weren't the dominant species, and I got the impression that I'd be fishing for a netful of silver fish, with an odd carp mixed in with them – perfect!

FIRST CHOICE

With these species in mind, I've brought along a small range of baits. The first combo is a popular one that I love fishing – worms and casters. In my experience, these catch nearly all species, and having a swim fed with these is a banker for bites. Don't get me wrong, though, I'm not talking about piling in large amounts of chopped worms and gallons of casters. Instead, I'm planning on using the casters as feed and simply fishing with worms on the hook.

As a feed bait, casters attract all kinds of fish – small roach will eat them, as will bream and tench, and even big wary carp. However, I'm then hoping to select the fish that I catch by changing my hook bait, as seen in the sequence.

OPTION TWO...

Having not fished the venue before, I want to make sure that I cover my options, otherwise if the fish don't take a liking to my natural-baits attack I have no backup.



The Frenzee adjustable tension bead is great when catching mixed species because you can quickly tension your elastic on a side puller.

I've also brought along some pellets, but rather than sticking to the standard carp and coarse pellets, I'm going to use expanders as both feed and hook baits. I always like to try and give myself an edge by doing something different from the norm. At new venues, it nearly always seems to work because the fish probably haven't seen it before!

I've pumped a bag of 6mm Bait-Tech Expand Pellets so they all sink. Another great thing about feeding expanders is that they swell up and you get loads of bait from just a single bag. The light pellets sink slowly, and by feeding a small amount of them regularly you create a column of bait falling through the water, constantly attracting fish, and holding them in the swim. >>>

HOOK BAITS

Worm Head

The perfect hook bait when you want to catch a fish every drop-in. Small roach and rudd love it because it looks like a caster. However, bigger bream and carp will happily take this when they move into the swim too.

Half Worm

A great hook bait when you're looking to target a bigger general stamp of fish. I like to use half a dendrabaena worm. The smaller stamp of fish can't fit this in their mouth easily and, being more visible, it seems to pick out species such as small carp, big skimmers, bream and tench.

Double Dendy!

This is one of my favourites – two full worms on the hook. I like to use this when there are loads of fish in the swim and I'm looking to pick out a real lump. Big carp love this hook bait and it's particularly effective if your swim is fizzing with activity from fish and you're suffering from line bites and foul-hooked fish.

On open-water swims, Andy is a big fan of attacking a longer-pole swim to attract fish from beyond pole reach.





Aggressively feeding casters draws all kinds of fish into your swim.



Doing something different from the norm, such as feeding expanders, is a good way to get an edge on new venues.



Always set up more rigs rather than less on your first visit – and be prepared to change as soon as you think you need to!

WHERE TO FISH

Plumbing up in front of me, I find that the lake is shallow in the edge and gradually gets deeper until the depth flattens out at five feet about eight metres out.

With the worms and casters, I'm planning on catching all kinds of fish, and to give myself the chance of drawing a range of fish in from a wide area, I'm going to fish this swim out in the open water at 13 metres.

I also fancy feeding a short swim with the pellets. Because the lake is such a big expanse of water I'm not expecting to catch here straightaway, but I'll feed this swim all the time by throwing in 20 or so expanders.

With the thought of 20lb-plus, or even 40lb carp swimming about in this lake, I can't help but set up another swim – the margins! Even here there's often a fine line between getting tactics right and wrong. I generally find that carp prefer either solid particle baits such as hemp, corn and pellets, or a fine fishmeal groundbait mix. To try and quickly establish which they prefer, I'm going to feed both – particles down one edge, and groundbait down the other.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

I start the session by chopping up a few worms and mixing them with plenty of casters. When I'm fishing on my own like this, I don't like wasting expensive baits such as worms, and you often only need a few chopped up to spur the fish into feeding. To help bulk out the mix I'm feeding hemp with it too – another good (and cheap) holding bait that all fish love!



Lake John is famous for huge carp on the pole – they reach over 40lb!

I then begin to feed expanders by hand on the short swim, but I'm going to leave my margin swim until later in the session. I've found that later in a session, big fish either settle on the short pole or the margins. As a safe bet, I always feed a short swim first because you can catch here much earlier in the day than you can in the margins.

If after three hours I hadn't caught on the short swim, then I would happily feed the margins.

EARLY ACTION

Shipping out with a worm head on the hook, the rig settles over the bait and continues going as if it's overshot. Picking up however, a foot of yellow Frenzee hollow rattles from the pole tip and I'm into a fish immediately – a lovely skimmer of around 8oz. When I ship

back out to lower the rig in again, the swim is already bubbling and fizzing with fish activity. I've had this happen at loads of venues but it normally takes a lot longer than two minutes to start!

Several more small skimmers follow in the opening part of the session, as well as a few quality roach and even a cute little tench. However, bites seem to suddenly fade and the fizzing in the swim slows – a sure signal that I need to feed again.

Topping up with the same handful of worms, casters and hemp brings another good response. I've changed to a bigger half to three-quarter piece of worm, and immediately caught another bigger tench, a couple of bream and some more skimmers.

The fishing is hectic as soon as I feed, before fading away again as the fish eat the bait. To catch for longer I could try potting in more bait. However, on a pleasure day like today I feel like a more positive loose-feeding ploy might be even more effective and give me the chance to catch even better in the upper layers!

BAGGING TIME!

After beginning to loose feed with casters, it's obvious that the fish have started to compete. I'm getting all kinds of weird bites on the float, caused by fish darting around and bumping into the line –



Although it wasn't in his initial plan, Andy ended up clattering the bigger fish shallow!

it's time to set up a shallow rig.

A lot of anglers shy away from setting up new rigs during a session, but if I feel a tactic is right, I do it – even in matches. This works with devastating effect and I enjoy a solid hour of bagging.

After 10 minutes I could see quality fish swirling, and although I expected to catch a lot of smaller roach up in the water, most of the fish are big skimmers with an odd bream mixed in – the decision has worked a treat!



What a day! Over 80lb of mixed species at a venue Andy had never seen before!

MARGIN MASTER

Although I'm catching really well now, I'm intrigued to see if any fish have settled short.

I'm surprised that I don't get an instant bite. In fact, it's a good five minutes before I do, despite there being so many fish on the longer-pole swim. This tells me that on this particular day the fish simply don't want to be here. However, with so many feeding up in the water, I could catch well down the edge now.

I believe groundbait and particles do different jobs – groundbait is ideal when you need to feed a lot of bait for catching large numbers of fish, while particles attract just one or two fish over a small area on the deck, making it easier to catch a big fish when there are fewer around.

I'm feeding five pots of loose groundbait

After it bottoms out the elastic, making a beeline around the corner towards a patch of reeds, I manage to net a stunning 12lb-plus Lake John carp.

down the left edge, and just a single pot of particles on the right, before fishing back on the longer swim for a few minutes to let these settle.

CLEAR CONCLUSIONS

After catching a few more skimmers shallow, I'm in on the groundbait with my favourite double-worm hook bait. I get indications instantly – my float bobs, dips, and trundles along the surface, but I never

get the positive whack under I'm waiting for. After feeding another pot of groundbait, the same happens, but this time I actually catch a small skimmer then a perch; time to try the particle swim!

With the same rig, in the same depth of water and with the same hook bait, my float sits dead still – no indications from small fish at all. Then, out of nowhere, it whacks under into a mass of swirls and I'm soon being dragged around on my box with a beast on the end! After it bottoms out the elastic, making a beeline around the corner towards a patch of reeds, I manage to net a stunning 12lb-plus Lake John carp.

There obviously weren't many big fish coming into the swim, but by keeping the feed tight with a small amount of particles on the deck I managed to catch one of the few

that came in to feed. Had this fish homed in on the groundbait, it would have likely blown bait all over, been eating over a bigger area and I'd have had little chance of hooking it.

It's a fantastic way to end an awesome day's fishing and I feel like I've worked out the key tactics. Remember, though, every day in fishing is different, but by being adaptable and approaching every session with different options, as I have today, you're sure to catch more fish! ■