

The Lucky Fishing Hat

On a cold January morning, I arrived at the river at 7 a.m. in an attempt to catch a pike. This river being the River Mole, a tributary of the Thames and the venue is Cobham, Surrey. The temperature was a few degrees below zero and the frozen grass crunched underfoot as I made my way to the chosen swim. This was 'the' swim which was going to produce a big fish, of that I was certain and nothing could convince me otherwise. If that swim did not hold a big pike then I would eat my hat – I wonder how many times we have said that. A few weeks ago I had caught a 15lb pike from further upstream after changing bait from a frozen smelt to a frozen trout so I thought that trout could well be the key to success on this morning. I don't go in for complicated rigs preferring to subscribe to the KIS (keep it simple) principal. I have a multitude of mechanical and electronic wizardry in the form of drop-back indicators and bite alarms which rarely, if ever, see the light of day, preferring to use a good old fashioned float set-up, a braided mainline of 30lb test, home made snap tackle made from seven strand 20lb wire, an assortment of rubber beads, a 1oz weight and a powergum floatstop. The rod is an elderly 11ft – 3lb test curve carbon fibre rod. The float is set over depth by about 2 feet with the slack line being taken up by the flow of the river. In eager anticipation the rig was cast to a likely spot and the waiting game began. After an hour of inactivity the future of my hat was becoming uncertain, one thing was for sure – the fish were not queuing up to eat my offerings. Just because they were not interested did not mean that the pike were not there – so, with that in mind, the hat had a reprieve. If all else fails – move swims, which is what I did – back to the bank from where my previous capture had come. I know from previous experience that the pike lie in a gulley just short of the reed beds on the opposite side of the river so this is where the, still pristine, now no-so frozen trout was cast. Memories of previous captures from this swim flooded back and quiet confidence returned as the float gently bobbed in the current. Once again the very existence of the hat was being gambled. Any minute now the float would be dragged upstream and the game would be on. It was then that the local robin put in an appearance expecting to be fed with some tasty morsel. Alas, he was to be disappointed on this day as all I had with me was frozen fish. The little bird twittered in the bush beside me then flew across to my left and settled in another bush where its shrill voice became ever more demanding. With no offering forthcoming it tried to draw attention to itself by landing on my rod and looking at me appealingly. I apologised most profusely for having no suitable food to give, but with every warble I was beginning to feel quite guilty – almost to the point where I considered leaving the swim to purchase some bread from the local Waitrose. Another robin then arrived which, no doubt, was told about the 'tight fisted old git' and the lack of food offerings. The news was obviously spreading fast, a kingfisher, cheeping its disapproval, flew past displaying its striking metallic blue plumage and a short time later a fox walked swiftly along the opposite bank, looked across at me for a few seconds, sneering as it did so, and then disappeared into the undergrowth. All this time the float remained bobbing gently in the stream. In a final 'two fingered salute' from nature, there was a splash from the direction of my float and as I looked, a pike's mouth engulfed the float, chewed on it, and spat it out in disgust. The hat must have given out a sigh of relief at the sight of the pike – it had been spared yet again. It was then that I took the hint and decided that it was time to go. Just because you do not catch any fish does not mean that the day is a disaster. Look at the positive side; I had just spent a morning in sub-zero temperatures where not even the most skilled person could get the balls to stay on a brass monkey. My bait was totally ignored by all the pike in the river as well as the crayfish; I had offended two robins and become an object of ridicule by a kingfisher, a fox, and the pike that bit my float. At least the hat survived to fish another day.