

# DISCOVER YOUR LAKE'S HIDDEN LAIRS

Winter is here and the carp are nowhere to be found. These fish cannot miraculously disappear, so **Jon Arthur** goes on the hunt for fish-filled hideaways!



**C**atching winter carp is a tricky affair. These fish start to shoal up very tightly as soon as the first frosts arrive. Their metabolism also slows, which means they are less active and can go many days without food. They therefore shoal together for safety and warmth and to get away from predators, bankside disturbance... and anglers!

If you can locate these tightly packed shoals of fish then you could be in for a bumper day, but even on a relatively small lake like the one I am on today, that's a difficult task. One problem is that these fish want little or no feed. In fact, experience tells me that as soon as I feed anything on top of a shoal of fish they are likely to swim off. These fish don't need to feed much to replenish lost energy so they will often treat loose feed with caution – especially large potfuls of bait dumped on their heads!

Over the years I've learnt to treat these uncooperative carp with a great deal of caution. That means not feeding a single loose offering until I think they will accept it.

Instead, the name of the game is what is commonly referred to as 'dobbing'. It takes a lot of self-restraint and confidence to target carp by simply dangling a single hook bait in the water – but when you finally catch a fish with this tactic you'll appreciate just how devastating it can be!

It sounds very simple – and in many ways it is – but there is still an art to this game and the stealthiest hunters should always catch more. You could also liken it to the fishing equivalent of a game of battleships!

## DEPTH DILEMMA

Torpid carp tend to sit off the bottom in the warmer layers of water, so the first objective is to try and dangle a hook bait

as near to their mouths as possible. After all, if a fish doesn't want to make any effort to feed it is far more likely to have a go at a tasty morsel if it's dangling there right between its eyes!

So, finding this depth is the first task. For obvious reasons, I don't like to drag a big plummet around the swim too much. Instead, I will quickly plumb up with a more discrete, small plummet to ascertain the depths in front of me. If I think I know where the carp are hiding I will also try to plumb up to the side of this spot rather than drop a plummet straight onto the fish's heads.

The actual depth to start at is debatable. I tend to begin anywhere between half depth and six inches off the bottom. If you are foul-hooking fish, come shallower; if you are not getting bites, try deeper. There is often a key depth that needs to be discovered.

## MARGIN SECRETS

Today I'm on Crater Pool on Phase Two of Makins Fishery in Leicestershire. This is a shallow, silty lake that has a pretty uniform depth all over. It is 3ft close in and no more than 4ft straight down the middle. Against the islands it is between 2ft and 3ft. The carp in this lake seem happiest hugging features so the numerous little islands are the obvious places to target. However, what many people are oblivious to is the fact that the margins are often an even better target – even in winter. These margins are actually deeper than against the islands, plus there is also plenty of foliage for cover. However, the main reason that I believe the margins can attract so many fish is the fact that many of the



FEATURE FINDING

After the session, Jon decided to see exactly how undercut his swim was. Even he was surprised to see a whole section of his **Drennan Rigidex** landing net handle disappear! No wonder fish feel safe in hidden lairs like this!

**ANGLER FILE**

Name: Jon Arthur  
Age: 37  
Lives: Coventry  
Pole: Drennan Acolyte

Jon is a two-time UK Champion, the 2013 Wychavon Champion and former group editor of Match Fishing and Pole Fishing magazines.



Even this surprise barbel was caught six inches off the deck!

*It's 3ft deep by the tree trunk... and undercut at least another 3ft!*

banks are undercut.

The swim that I am fishing today is a perfect example. There is a large tree right next to the water's edge which conceals the entrance to a hidden lair. I knew it was undercut but it was only after today's session that I decided to have a good poke around with my landing net handle to see just how much. To my amazement I could poke half of my Drennan Rigidex landing net handle underneath the bank! That meant there was still water directly underneath where I was kneeling – a proper carp grotto! I imagine a swim like this offers plenty of warmth plus no chance of winged predators attacking them. The fact that this swim is just a few feet away from a busy footpath doesn't seem to put the fish off either! I suppose that I could have sat on the adjacent platform and tackled the swim with just my top kit. I am sure this would work in

summer, but as the water is so clear and the fish are on their guard I have decided to sit two platforms away instead. This allows me to reach the swim with 14 metres of Drennan Acolyte pole and offers plenty of space between myself and the fish.

**DOBBING GEAR**

As far as tackle goes, I have assembled one simple rig. This is a 0.1g Drennan AS4 on 0.15mm Supplex line to a 0.129mm hooklength and size 18 Silverfish Pellet hook. Elastic is 6-8 Bungee, which is very soft and forgiving to prevent a fish bolting as soon as it is hooked. Snaggier pegs may require hit-and-hold tactics but on a swim like this I try to let a hooked fish swim out of the swim with as little disturbance as possible and then use my puller kit to full advantage to power things up at the netting stage.

My starting hook bait is normally a 7mm piece of punch. I prefer thick-sliced Warburtons bread for this game as it swells up nicely and is a tempting mouthful for a carp to slurp in. Roach can be a problem with bread, though, so if they are beating the carp to the bait I will often switch to two or three dead maggots. This is a more resilient alternative, plus dead maggots definitely seem to flutter more invitingly than live offerings. Finally, I will also try corn. This is an extremely visual bait but also quite heavy, so I compensate for this by hooking a grain and then squeezing some of the insides out. The resulting 'corn skin' flutters as it sinks and is easily to suck in.

**THE SESSION**

It may surprise you to hear that I always like to target the least likely areas at the start of a session. This just helps me ascertain how my rig is behaving and can also yield an early fish or two. By targeting these areas first you can also help to herd the fish into the area where

you actually expect to catch them. Today, I have therefore started against the two islands in front of me but that has only yielded two roach. So, I have swung my pole around to my left-hand margin and carefully laid in a piece of punched bread. I deliberately start short of where I expect to catch best, so I have begun at 13 metres rather than tight to the tree.

The ploy has worked, as a tiny tremble signals something is in the area. Another tiny dip on the float could easily have been a roach but the resulting strike sees plenty of Bungee elastic leave the pole as the first carp of the session lunges away. A handsome 2lb common carp is soon subdued. Hopefully I've located the shoal!

With no more bites at 13 metres I gradually work my way closer and closer towards the fish's lair. It soon becomes obvious where the fish are as my float shudders as it settles. Several more carp from 1lb to 6lb soon find their way into my keepnet. I then catch a 10oz chub followed by a surprise barbel. It's amazing

Despite all of the open water in front of Jon, the fish preferred the sanctuary of their underwater cave!

what you can catch six inches off the bottom in winter!

Although I have caught with bread and corn skins on the hook, double or triple maggot seems to have been best today.

With a number of good fish already in my keepnet the swim goes quiet, which isn't too much of a surprise. My next trick is to try other areas of the swim just to give this main hotspot a rest for 10 minutes. Again, this does the trick and by regularly resting the swim I manage to extract several more carp for a great winter bag – all down the margins and all without feeding a single thing!



A 7mm Drennan bread punch is the best starting size.



Two or three dead maggots are an excellent alternative.



Sweetcorn is highly visible and more small-fish-proof.



Try hooking a grain of corn and then squeezing it.



The flattened 'corn skin' will waft enticingly as it falls.

Thanks to Makins Fishery for the use of its venue: [www.makinsfishery.co.uk](http://www.makinsfishery.co.uk)



Jon's essential dobbing gear!



A netful of fish – and all without feeding a thing!