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Lockdown Musings

By Tony Gibson



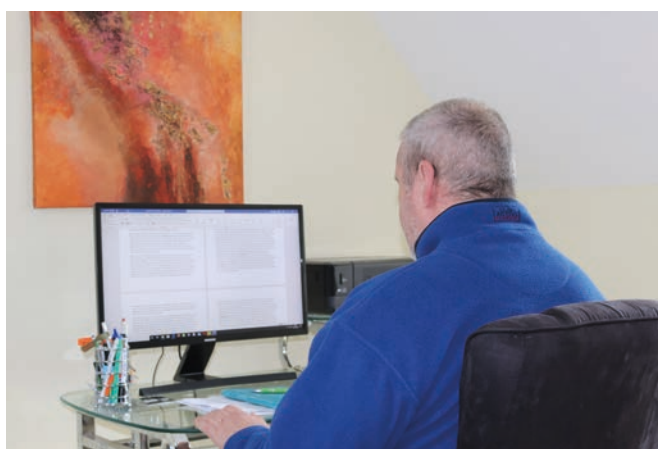
As I write this, the COVID-19 related restrictions in the UK have been in place for several weeks and, taking a wild guess, I'm assuming that the same, or similar, restrictions will be with us for some time to come. It's an incredibly frustrating time for many anglers, but for most of us the fact that we can't go fishing is the worst thing that's happening, while for others, they or their loved ones are suffering direct and dire consequences from the virus: the reality is that the majority of us are getting off incredibly lightly. So I'm thinking that the best way of dealing with this coronavirus related 'lockdown' is to just put up with it and use the available time to get on with some home-based projects that I've been putting off for ages.

I've done a bit of tidying up in the garage but have so far resisted actually sorting out my fishing gear in any meaningful way whatsoever. I know plenty of my angling friends and Facebook buddies have been doing loads

of this tackle-related stuff, including cleaning their gear, tying rigs, tidying their tackle boxes and all manner of stuff, but I just can't seem to find the motivation until I've got a much clearer indication of when I can actually get back to the water, the venue(s) I'll be fishing and what I'll be fishing for. I admire the guys that can do it, but I've never had the self-discipline to get all ultra-prepared with stacks of spare rigs and suchlike that some guys manage. As an all-rounder, rather than only fishing for carp, and sometimes fishing a variety of venues within a fairly short space of time, I'm often having to swap my gear about with very little notice and making tackle and rig changes 'on the fly' anyway. To be truthful, I hate tying rigs and if I've just spent 10 minutes or whatever tying up the latest 'super-duper, super-sharp can't possibly fail' rig, then it's probably because I want to get it on the end of my mainline and cast out... not pegged next to another two dozen identical-looking wonder creations sitting in a rig box.

My other half is a bit of a 'neat-freak', but fortunately she's not dreamt up any fresh ideas based around major DIY home renovation, or decorating activities, during the "lockdown" period. However, I know I'm one of the lucky ones. Again Facebook updates, and a number of sorrowful communications from friends, have revealed that a large percentage of keen anglers are finding themselves getting roped into all manner of home and garden improvement projects as their partners realise that they've suddenly been presented with this remarkable 'window of opportunity' to get various tasks done that they thought would never realistically get priority scheduling.

So what am I actually doing during this 'lockdown' period then? Well, no surprise that the two main activities are both fishing related, one of which is trying to catch up on some much-neglected writing. I always seem to have at least two or more fishing related writing jobs that are rather urgently creeping towards the top of the list of priority jobs that I need to start paying some attention to. I write quite regularly for my tackle and bait sponsors to provide content for websites, social media and the magazines, while I also receive a number of separate requests each year for magazine articles, book contributions and suchlike, some of



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which I have to refuse simply because of the time involved and the number of other things I want to be doing. So, due to the writing that I do anyway, the idea of knuckling down and making a proper start on writing my own book always keeps getting relegated down the priority order and up to now I've never made a start on that particular project. However, with the extra free time provided by the current situation – and, it has to be said – some timely prompting from a number of friends, I've actually added this particular writing project to my list of “stuff” to do... and have made a tentative start. As I've begun to flesh out the potential list of chapters and contents, the size of the undertaking is becoming clearer... and even with a conservative estimate looks to be verging towards a rating of ‘massive’ on the scale of home-project endeavours. This may mean that writing my own book never actually gets completed, and may simply come to a grinding halt once we can get out fishing again, but for now, I've made a start and we'll see how things progress.

The other main fishing related, home-based, activity that I'm undertaking is doing lots of re-reading from my collection of fishing magazines. There's a special reason for doing this, as currently my rather large magazine collection is being kept in a number of storage boxes, as are my slide and photo collections, general paperwork and other assorted paraphernalia associated with my ‘home office’. A few months ago my partner decided that we needed new carpets in several rooms, including my ‘office’ at home... And while we were about it, why not get some proper brand new office furniture for my ‘den’ to replace the random assemblage of old spare furniture items, and the precarious stacks of files and folders that served as my office ‘storage system’?

At the time this all sounded very reasonable: as long as the suggested timescales didn't interfere with any major fishing plans, or whatever, then who was I to argue? So just before the new carpets were due to be fitted, I disassembled my ‘den’, including dismantling the old bookcase that had helped to house my vast, and still-growing, hoard of fishing magazines. I should add that due to the age and condition of the old bookcase, there was never any intention of keeping it. I'd already had to undertake a number of emergency repairs to keep the thing serviceable anyway, and if the new furniture was to have a hope of storing some of the stuff that I already had, plus additional reading material that I'd no doubt be acquiring in the future, then some serious ‘thinning out’ of the older stuff needed to be carried out. So with my ‘office-related’ paperwork, magazines, books and everything else in boxes and the new carpets down, along comes the COVID-19 related ‘lockdown’ and the end to any idea of getting my new office furniture

delivered and installed any time soon. However, the unexpected advantage of the current situation is that I've got some extra time to re-read some of the magazines before I finally pass them on as part of the thinning out process.

At one time, before we moved into our current place, I'd accumulated an even larger collection of fishing magazines, dating back to the 70s, including



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a nearly complete set of Carpworld magazines from issue 1. I had so many magazines, and other printed material, that loads of the earlier ones had to be stored in cardboard 'removal' boxes in the garage, as there simply wasn't space in the house to keep them. All was fine until the garage roof started to leak... directly onto the stack of boxes containing the stored magazines! This ruined a large number of the earliest magazines, and for nostalgia reasons I'm reluctant to get let go

of the few remaining examples that I still have. This has meant that my re-reading of fishing magazines has started with issues dating back to around the early/mid 90s.

Re-reading the old carp magazines has been a pleasure, and as I read relatively quickly, at times I've been getting through several issues per day. This is where certain past trends and fashions become highlighted, some of them providing food for thought, and the rekindling of ideas that may be worth revisiting again.

It soon became apparent that carp fishing was obsessed with bait in the early 90s. I guess with the various different developments involving specials, milk protein, HNVs, particles, fishmeals, flavours, attractors and all manner of bait-related products and methods, all making progress and producing good results on various venues and at different times, it was both an exciting and confusing



I was 'into' baits myself in the 80s. Here's one of my big Sywell reservoir tench caught on homemade boilies back in 1987

period... which in turn created a seemingly endless amount of debate. It appears that there's much less concern about bait for most carp anglers nowadays, perhaps because there are so many bait firms producing quality boilies, fully-prepared particles, pellets and everything else, that the majority no longer spend the time getting involved in the theoretical side of bait development? Nowadays we can simply allow the experienced bait gurus to develop and produce tried and tested bait products that we can just pick off the shelf, or have delivered straight to our doorsteps.

Another shift in bait development, manufacture and usage I've noticed radically changing in that 25-year period is that there's now a general trend to be more open about ingredients. This is possibly due to the fact that UK and EC legislation for animal feeds now applies to many manufactured fishing baits, such as boilies, pellets and ground-baits, and only items that are on the appropriate lists of approved products are being used (and, contrary to what was happening 20-odd years ago, we now have a full list of ingredients appearing on most boilie packaging). Also, in the old magazines that I've been reading there was much concern about the poor preparation of various particles baits, some of which were being treated as the possible suspects in a number of carp deaths at various venues. It seems now that most of the potential problem-particles have virtually disappeared from the recommended lists of dry-particle suppliers, while for many anglers, prepared particles that can conveniently be bought in a can or jar have done away with the need to spend the time, energy and the worry associated with the proper preparation of this kind of bait.

Another noticeable change in the magazines over the years has been



I find the fabulous scenic photos are especially welcome. This one was taken at a Northampton SG social last September.

in the number and quality of the photos used to support all the written material. I can easily believe that there's now at least two or three times the amount of photographic content than there was back in the early/mid 90s, and the sheer variety and clarity of the images we are treated to nowadays bear little resemblance to what we had previously. I find the fabulous scenic photos are especially welcome when they accompany the articles about a

particular campaign, session, or catch, as the photos really help the reader to visualise the setting.

A good writer can often capture the atmosphere in just words alone, but not everyone is gifted with this particular talent and the appropriate images certainly help to set the scene. The spectacular increase in quality photos isn't just limited to scenic, either, as many of the trophy shots in the old mags were very poor compared to what we're used to seeing today. Even the quality of images related to the technical details and rig illustrations has clearly come on in leaps and bounds. I guess the imagery has become so good, and of such a high standard, that a video has become the next stage in the process, and a string of photos with associated text is now being replaced with recorded videos and the spoken word.

It's been interesting to note from reading the old carp magazines how some apparently successful methods have fallen out of favour. I spotted several examples of this, but particularly noticeable was the "pop-up off the lead" tactic. In several of the old articles I've just been reading describing sessions that have been memorable for one reason or another, there have been several examples of how the author has decided to fish one rod with a pop-up boilie straight off the lead. This is without any counterbalance weight of any sort on the hook-length, so it's deliberately anchored directly above the lead, usually somewhere between 6 and 18 inches up. Often, this has been the most successful tactic of all, or has resulted in the capture



There was no 'pulling back' involved in the capture of this scaley mid-30 from last year.

of the largest carp of the session. It's a tactic that seems to have fallen out of favour in recent years, and certainly I can't remember the last time I fished a pop-up in this fashion... or indeed the last time I've even seen anyone else use it, or had a discussion about it. Perhaps this is due to the recent popularity of other 'up-in-the-water' tactics, especially zig-fishing, having taken over? Whatever the reason I reckon I'm going to give the "pop-up off the

lead" a go once we get back on the bank... and perhaps I can give myself an occasional 'edge' using this now neglected method?

Judging by what I've been reading, another one of the tactics that was used quite frequently back in the 90's that seems to have fallen out of favour was "pulling back", which was basically the process of tightening down to the lead just after casting and then gently pulling back the end tackle for various distances. The reasons behind the action were various, but generally were

to either feel if the end tackle had landed in weed, to unplug the lead from the silt, or drag the end-tackle onto the preferred type of bottom (again by feeling the feedback from the lead travelling over the lakebed). I have to admit that it never really appealed to me, as I'd be very concerned about either pulling the hook into weed or some other type of 'choddy' detritus on the bottom or blunting the hook-point on gravel or whatever. I think plenty of others felt the same way at the time and the tactic appeared to provoke quite a bit of debate. It's certainly not a practise you see being used very often nowadays. I suspect that "pulling back" has largely been replaced with the popular tactic of feeling the lead down in the first instance, or feeling for the 'donk', to gain an initial understanding of the type of bottom that has just been cast to?

Another one I saw mentioned in print a couple of times in the old magazines was the use of brightly painted leads. I remember a couple of my mates using this idea way back in the late 80s, and it was clearly still being used in the early to mid-90s. The idea was the bright lead would stand out from the dull bottom, catching the eye of the carp, and having piqued its curiosity it would hopefully draw the fish

down to investigate... where it would find the hookbait and hopefully take it. I'm guessing that this tactic has been almost totally superseded by the profusion of brightly-coloured boilies and artificial hookbaits that are designed, in part, to do exactly the same job? I do wonder, though, whether using the bright lead and a 'standard' hookbait might just provide a 'best of both worlds' scenario,

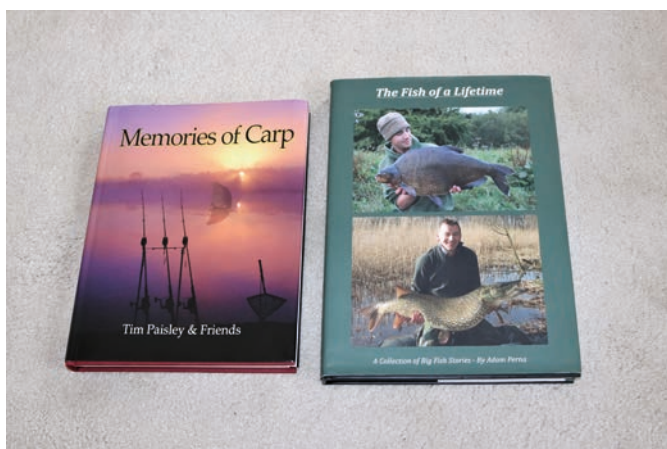
where the bright lead draws the fish towards the end-tackle and is the focus of the carp's curiosity, but also overcomes any possible caution... with the nearby 'standard' hookbait being treated with no suspicion whatsoever and sucked in without a care...?



I'm guessing that the 'bright lead' tactic has been superseded by the profusion of brightly-coloured boilies and artificial hookbaits.

Some of my favourite articles, whether from the old magazines, or from new material, have to be the well written, atmospheric descriptions of a session or campaign. Obviously most are written about those times that cumulate in a major result of some sort, which can be very inspirational, but some of the better ones have also described the grim reality of a more disastrous trip, where a series of misfortunes have made the session memorable for all the wrong reasons. Both can be quite gripping for the reader.

As well as the magazine articles I've used this "lockdown" period to re-read a couple of my favourite books that are full of this type of material and describe some incredibly successful sessions and some very big fish. I'm sure most anglers would find they made for very entertaining reading during this extended 'lockdown' period if they can get their hands on them. The first contains carp-only material and provides around 30 chapters of fabulously written stories about memorable carp catches, made both in



The book is "Memories of Carp" by Tim Paisley and friends. The second book is called "The Fish of a Lifetime" (A Collection of Big fish Stories – By Adam Perna).

the UK and worldwide. Some of the carp captures described in the book relate to some of the very biggest carp known in the UK and abroad at the time. The book is "Memories of Carp" by Tim Paisley and friends. The second book is called "The Fish of a Lifetime" (A Collection of Big fish Stories – By Adam Perna). While there are a couple of chapters that relate to some incredible carp captures, the freshwater species covered by the various chapters are incredibly varied and the book would

appeal to both carp anglers and "all-rounders". I've written the foreword to this book, and the majority of the big fish stories that are in the book have been written by anglers who have rarely, if ever, written about their angling beforehand. The result is that this makes for some very fresh and entertaining reading... and some of the fish described in the book are truly massive!

Hope the above has helped to relieve the 'lockdown' boredom for some of you, or provided you with a few things to think about, or to search out, to help keep the non-fishing frustrations at bay for a while longer. Stay safe and well and with 'fingers crossed' this dreadful period will eventually be behind us and we can get back on the bank to chase our dreams.