

# Pike Care and Handling

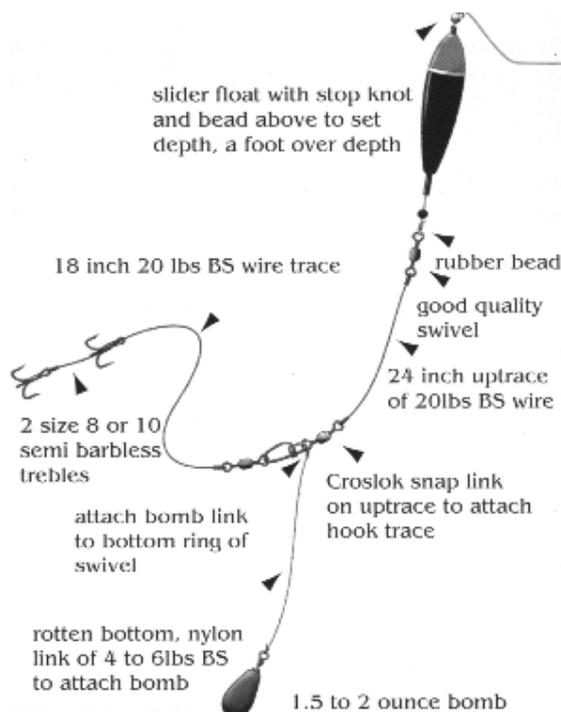
By Barry Summerhayes

As many of you know, I dabble a little in Pike fishing and although the match boys are complaining that there are too many, there isn't a massive stock of 'specimen' sized fish, i.e. 15lbs and upwards in the Warren. We therefore need to protect the ones we have, they will more effectively keep the population of 'Jack' Pike down better than any netting possibly could. I have over the last few seasons, as Pike fishing has become more and more popular, caught an increasing number of Pike with residual traces in their throats, we even pulled out a tethered one while netting (which subsequently died). To my horror, the first Pike I caught this year was trailing at least 50 yards of braid and a trace way down in its stomach!

I have on numerous occasions 'operated' on Pike and carefully removed the majority of these traces. However unless you are very confident at handling Pike this is a tricky job, so prevention is better than cure!!!!!!

Below are a few tips on how to 'prevent' these occurrences:-

1. Always use a wire trace, DUH! fundamental you might say, but I have pulled up adults for not using them!!!!!! Ensure that the trace is at least 18" long, this will help to prevent bite offs, recently I have seen people spinning with traces as short as 8", a big Pike could engulf that and the lure and bite straight through the mainline, leading to its possible death from its inability to get food past the offending lure.
2. Check the condition of your line, there are an awful lot of zebra mussels in the lake to damage it. Again, fundamental but essential if using braid, ensure you adjust your clutch to compensate for the lack of stretch.
3. When using the sunken paternoster rig, ensure you have an uptrace - you can use shorter hook traces with this technique.



Where a crosslock swivel has been used in this picture, I would use a 3-way swivel. While this rig is predominantly a livebait rig, it is also effective for suspending big dead baits.

4. Bite detection, if you are likely to be chatting or making rigs etc, and generally not observing the water, then you need to use a reliable audible and visual alarm. Teaching an old dog new tricks? If your method of bite detection isn't efficient you will end up with a deep hooked Pike.
5. 'Hitting' a take should be immediate, none of this counting to ten rubbish!!! If the line is running from the reel or your float has gone under, hit it IMMEDIATELY! Chances are if you miss the take it was only a small jack, a big Pike generally gorges a bait straight into its mouth.
6. Do not leave rods unattended, a Pike can swallow a big bait in seconds!

## Handling

This is a fairly contentious issue: if you aren't confident go fishing with someone who is. There is nothing worse than seeing someone catch a big Pike, then have it out of the water for too long while pussy around trying to unhook it!!!! Pike are delicate and need to be handled with care and spend as little time out of the water as possible.

If you are new to Pike fishing wear gloves (Stanford Tackle sells some metal chain mail gloves which I first used about 15 years ago!!!!) Lay the Pike on its back on an unhooking mat, kneel either side of it, then gently slide your fingers up under the gill cover and lift the bottom jaw, the mouth will open easily and the weight of the Pike will hold it still allowing you to use a long (15"+) pair of forceps (which Stanford Tackle also sells) to remove the hooks. Smaller Pike are more challenging, but if you are afraid of getting a few 'nicks' then I suggest you stick to carp!



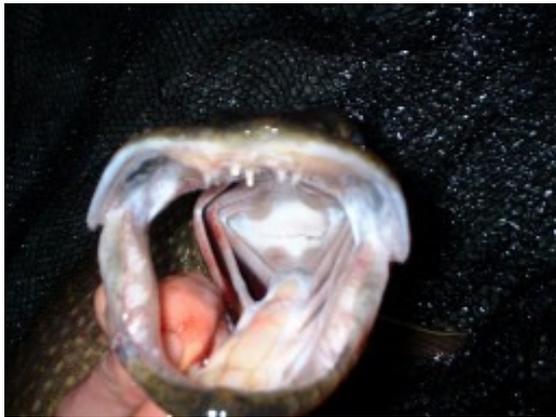
This Pike is lying on its side but it will serve to illustrate the point



Open the gill cover with your finger, taking care not to put your finger in too far!



Then slide your finger as far as it will go towards the pike's chin



Lift your finger up and the weight of the pike will cause its mouth to open up wide....



....allowing you to carefully extract the hooks.

**When returning your pike to the water take some time to hold her in the margins to give her time to recover and ensure that she is swimming up the right way BEFORE you let her go**

## Landing your Pike

Many of you would have seen me hand landing Pike; this requires a lot of confidence and if done incorrectly can damage the Pike's gill rakers so unless you have been shown how to do it 'properly' use your landing net. The cost of a new net after a decent seasons Piking is minimal compared to the loss of fish! The Club rules state that you must have a net and unhooking mat: I still have a net ready for the 'biggie'.

Just remember, when you have unhooked the Pike to drop the trace in the forceps AWAY from the net! It can take ages to get them out of the net if you don't.

If you get confident enough to try hand landing, experiment with smaller Pike first and be prepared to bleed a little, it is easy to put your fingers straight on their teeth!

## Kit

You should have, at the very minimum, a pair of 15 inch plus forceps, 2 or 3 pairs can be useful if you have a deep hooked Pike.

A pair of sidecutters can help to cut trebles in awkward places enabling removal afterwards, and for getting trebles out of your landing net! If you are using big lures then it is sometimes necessary to cut off a hook and a very long pair of longnose pliers can be indispensable.

When choosing your hook pattern it makes unhooking easier if you use semi barbed or barbless hooks.

IF ANY OF YOU OWN A PIKE GAG LIKE THIS ONE, PLEASE DO THE HONOURABLE THING.....



**DESTROY  
IT!**

## **Weighing Your Fish**

Again, this may seem fundamental, but Pike are long fish, normal carp slings can be dangerous with the Pike falling out. The Half-moon shape ones are better for this, they can also be used to return your fish to the water.



The main reason for me writing this is so that one or two fish might benefit from better handling as a result. If you already are a competent Pike angler and you see someone struggling, including day ticket anglers, they maybe a total dipstick but for the fish's sake help them to do it right. I know that most of the members are very conscientious and I'm probably teaching you to suck eggs, but fish welfare is my first and foremost priority.

If you ever need a few tips or help or advice, we don't bite, .....but hopefully the Pike will!!!

