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# POLE FISHING

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# POLE PUNTER

Bury Hill Fishery manager **Russ Evans** invited deputy editor **Mark Williams** on a pole fishing session with a difference – off a punt!

**W**hile shooting a feature at Monk's Lake, Kent, for our August issue, Russ spoke to me about the punt fishing on the Old Lake at Bury Hill Fishery. I wasn't exactly convinced because it seems such a long way from the standard pole fishing that I do on a weekly basis. However, following a little thought – and some gentle persuasion on Russ' part – I accepted and started to wonder about the hows and whys of punt fishing.

I was fully aware of the size and nature of a punt because I'd used one before to get different angles for taking pictures on a previous feature. Nevertheless, pole fishing off one would take some getting used to. I mean, where do you position your pole roller? Top kit roosts? Will it fit my seatbox? It's not luxurious fishing but I expected it to be fun.

The punts can be booked in advance at the fishery tackle shop by any angler. There is a fleet of eight and on many weekends they're all booked out, so, if you're interested, make sure that you book in advance. Most of the anglers use them to get into the unpegged 'jungle' section and tend to fish with rod and line but we'd be bucking the trend.

I spoke to Russ before the scheduled day to get the lowdown on the appropriate tackle required but more to find out about the equipment that he'd take so that I could thin mine out – I wouldn't be using the kitchen sink on board HMS Punt.

The kit list read like this:

Seatbox

Carryall containing bait and odd bits to use

Pole with couple of top kits

Landing net and handle »

Pole fishing off a punt is exciting and challenging. Try it at Bury Hill Fishery, Blenheim Palace or Patshull Park.

A photograph of two men in a punt on a river. The man in the foreground is wearing a red shirt and blue overalls, looking towards the left. The man in the background is wearing a blue shirt and blue overalls, also looking towards the left. They are both holding long fishing rods. The punt is green and has various fishing equipment on board, including a red bucket and a black box. The background is a dense green forest.

## BURY HILL PUNT RULES

No under 18s allowed in boats unless accompanied by an adult.

Boats must not be taken without prior permission or payment for all occupants.

Life jackets are available on free loan with a £25 deposit. We recommend that you use one.

A maximum of three persons per boat.

Dogs are not allowed in boats.

Boats must keep at least 25 yards from all fishing banks, with the exception of the island and jungle.

Do not moor where bank anglers are fishing. This is particularly important around the island.

Boats must only land back at the boathouse.

Please ensure that the boat is left clean and tidy and that the anchors have been washed off.

Report any loss of oars, paddles or breakages to the bailiff immediately.

Boats must be back in the boathouse 45 minutes before dark.

## VENUE FILE

### BURY HILL FISHERY

**Location:** Westcott, Surrey

**Contact:** 01306 883621

It's safer/easier to fish off the same side of the punt.



Russ positioned all of his shot just eight inches from the hook.

Keeping the kit down to a minimum is essential because there's not an awful lot of room to manoeuvre on the punt, especially with two of us in it. My main concern was getting a Rive D36 seatbox on board; having enough room to fish may be difficult. Plus, there's a possibility of my rather large seatbox sinking the punt. I needn't have worried because Russ assured me that the punts are actually unsinkable.

I then spent quite a bit of time tying special rigs for the Old Lake and making sure that there was nothing unnecessary in my carryall.

The bait would be 1kg of 4mm carp pellets, some expander pellets and fishmeal groundbait. The main target species were skimmers/bream but Russ told me that there might be a visit from a crucian or tench; if we were really lucky we may get towed around the lake by a carp – they run to over 30lb in this lake.

I met up with the photographer at 7am, aiming to be at Bury Hill for just after nine o'clock. We were on track until a lorry caught fire on the M40 and we were held up in huge tailbacks for well over two hours!

We eventually arrived just after midday, a bit weary and

disappointed that we'd missed out on three hours' fishing already. Russ was obviously raring to go and he had his gear loaded in the punt already.

I then made my first mistake of the day; I opted to leave my seatbox in the car and just take the trays that held my rigs, drawer system and base. I thought I'd be okay sitting on the fibreglass hull. The rest of my gear was easily transported to, and positioned on, HMS Punt.

Russ gave me a small rowing demonstration as we left the harbour. Messers Redgrave and Pinsent need not be quaking in their boots; Russ I didn't exactly make a good coxless pairing as we weaved across the lake.

After successfully navigating to our fishing area, we had to drop anchor. These are simply concrete blocks that have been formed with a

chain attached so you can lower them to the bottom, tighten up to them and attach it to a hook. Doing this at both ends ensures that you stay as still as possible. Other fisheries use long, wooden stakes that are driven into the lake bed. Imagine hooking a wooden stake and trying to get it off bottom.

The Old Lake is about 12 acres, so there's plenty of room for punt anglers and bank fishing, but Russ was keen to explain one of his key rules.

"It's important for the punt anglers to be aware of the spots that bank anglers are fishing to. They need to give them plenty of

space and make sure that they don't moor up near to the spots – it has happened many times!"

There was absolutely no possibility of mooring up over any lines

because we were about 80 yards from the bank and the anglers on the front bank were fishing with float tackle.

As we'd lost a considerable amount of time already we were both keen to get started. I opted to concoct my own groundbait instead of using Russ' pre-prepared mix – mistake number two. I also used my own carp pellets instead of Russ' halibut offerings – mistake number three!

I opted to concoct my own groundbait instead of Russ' pre-prepared mix.

Setting up all of the gear so that it didn't get broken or crushed was a struggle but we got there eventually. I was glad that I hadn't bought my seatbox but my backside was suffering from sitting on the hard surface. All items of tackle were placed neatly in the wells or laid up against the punt sides so that they couldn't roll into the lake.

Russ recommended that we both fished off the same side. This makes it much easier to fish together and it prevents us from hitting each other with our poles. We plumbed up at about seven metres, enough distance to be away from the commotions on the punt but close enough to be easy to fish. If you feel the need to fish longer, just moor up closer

**True to his word, one of us had a skimmer first chuck – me!**

to the position you want to fish. Below our punt the lake bed was still shelving away from the island, so we found the flat area and set our rigs to fish a couple of inches overdepth. Russ reckoned this was the killing area for the bream and we were certain to catch them, even in the few hours that we had to fish.

My rig was no different to a normal set-up but Russ had positioned all of his shot (0.75g) eight inches from the hook. This is not exactly traditional bream tactics but he assured me that it was right and would allow him to see the bites better. It would also anchor his bait in place because the lake was towing slightly from right to left.

Because we were positioned virtually on the shoal, Russ opted against a heavy feeding approach and said it would be best to cup in one ball with a few pellets and build up the swim. We were likely to catch one first chuck. So, at the same time, we both shipped out with our pole pots and potted in the groundbait and pellets. Russ had his trusty 6mm Ringer expander pellets already pumped up while I had a mixture of Sonubaits Fin Perfect 4mm and 6mm. Russ was convinced that the Ringers were better because they're

darker and match his feed offerings: 3mm halibut pellets. This was the only hook bait we had, so soft pellets would have to work!

Russ had the baited rig in the water first but, true to his word, one of us had a skimmer first chuck – me! It was about 12oz and a very welcome start. Russ was soon off the mark with a similar-sized skimmer.

I'd love to say that it was a good battle between us but Russ employed his local knowledge and completely stole the show. Bearing in mind we were fishing a matter of metres away from each other, I simply couldn't get a bite for most of the day while Russ was catching odd fish. He even had a good bream to about 4lb and commented that, had the day been right, there is a distinct possibility of catching one over 6lb.

I couldn't understand why I wasn't getting bites so I switched to Russ' approach and even fed his pellets and groundbait to try and stir things up.



These are Russ' baits for Bury Hill – halibut pellets and fishmeal groundbait.



The two most important items of boat fishing tackle – oars and anchor!

I was soon rewarded with the signs of feeding fish, small bubbles popping on the surface. Not long afterwards the orange bristle disappeared and I met a healthy weight as I lifted into the bite. Almost simultaneously Russ lifted into a fish, so we both played and netted similar-sized skimmers. This was to be the only time that we each held a skimmer aloft for a picture because I only managed to put one more into the net before we had to paddle for home. Russ ended up with about 16 skimmers while I was made to eat humble pie and consider my three mistakes. **POLE**



Although well beaten on this occasion, I will be back to fish off a punt again.