

How to succeed fishing the Ilkley Angling Association (IAA) ponds at Ben Rhydding **by David Martin, IAA Secretary**

Introduction

I have been fishing the two Ilkley AA ponds for over 40 years. I am a very keen all-round coarse and game angler and I always have been. The purpose of this series of articles is to try to pass on some of my huge experience to others so that they can enjoy fishing the club's waters as much as I have (and still do). I am inclined to waffle on at times and but I did want to give readers a full and detailed picture of the fishing at the ponds. So feel free to either read it all or to skip straight forwards to the sections of my article that interest you the most. For each of my articles I will cover the topics of:

- Open seasons and other **legalities**
- How – the main **angling tactics** and the best tackle for each tactic
- **When to fish** – seasons, weather conditions, time of day, etc.
- **Where** to fish in the ponds

Our two ponds – both are gravel pits dug around 50-60 years ago - are named the **Members Lagoon (ML)** for short) and the **Roadside Lagoon (RL)** and they are situated adjacent to the A65 about half a mile east of Ben Rhydding. There is easy parking immediately past the car wash. Going through the gate the RL is 100m directly to the right and the ML is 100m to the left. The ML is a particularly pleasant scenic and peaceful place to fish.

The club has ownership of the 8.6 acres of land on which the ML is situated. Bradford Metropolitan Council owns the land on which the RL is situated. This land is designated a Local Nature Reserve and is managed by the Wharfedale Naturalists.

There have been dramatic changes to the fishing at both the ponds over their life time.

Fish species

The main species of fish present in both ponds are Tench, Perch and Roach. In 2018 the largest Tench reported caught were 4lb 14oz (RL) and 4lb 0oz (ML). In early-2019 some Tench to over 4lbs were stocked into the ML. The Perch and Roach rarely reach 8oz. Other fish species present of interest to us anglers include Rudd (ML only), Bream (ML only) and Pike (RL only). Pike of over 10lbs have been caught. In the past both ponds also contained Carp but eventually all these all died out and the club decided not to stock any more (partly because of possible predation by Otters).

Challenges

The two ponds do not currently provide easy fishing but it is hoped that, through an intensive fisheries management programme that is currently underway, they will become easier.

Weed is a further challenge. In recent years huge quantities of lily roots have been removed from the mainly fairly shallow Members Lagoon so there are currently around ten lily/weed free, easy to fish swims there. Weed is a bigger challenge in the mainly deep Roadside Lagoon. Other than in the spring it is usually necessary to rake the weed to clear a swim prior to fishing. But you may be lucky and find that another angler (maybe me!) has cleared it for you.

Both ponds are only lightly fished and both have large quantities of natural food for the fish. This means that the fish often do not respond to anglers bait. Sometimes Tench will be bubbling in the swim, occasionally right near to your bait, but you still don't get a bite. Do not feed heavily but light pre-baiting and light loose feeding whilst fishing can sometimes get the fish feeding on bait. So don't expect many bites but be alert to strike when you do get one.

Legalities

Both ponds are open to fish all year round.

All anglers over the age of 12 must be in possession of an Environment Agency fishing rod licence. This rod licence does not give you permission to fish the IAA waters. All anglers over the age of 12 must also have either a season or a day Ilkley Angling Association permit or be a guest of a member who is present with them.

No fish may be taken from the ponds and also none must be introduced. A maximum of two rods may be used. Spinning is allowed on the Roadside Lagoon.

Angling Tactics

The main tactics are float fishing or ledgering. I will cover both in turn but in brief.

Float fishing

Usually my preference is to float fish because usually I am fishing my baits only a couple of rod lengths out from the bank. However sometimes I may fish one float rod and one ledger rod or sometimes two ledger rods.

When targeting Tench or Perch (which for me is most of the time) I will plumb the depth and set my float so as to be fishing my bait on the bottom. Roach, Rudd and Perch can all be caught by fishing a bait either on or off the bottom.

Regarding tackle I myself usually use a float rod of 13' to 14' but pole anglers have done very well on both ponds in the past. If you are targeting the Tench then I would advise you to use a fairly strong rod matched with a hook length of at least 4lb breaking strain (I usually use 6lb bs).

Ledger fishing

Whilst I prefer to float fish for Tench I do sometimes ledger. Favourite ledger set ups include a method feeder, maggot feeder or straight legered bait. I use an Avon or light carp strength rod of 11' to 12' matched with a 6lb or 8lb breaking strain hook length.

Preferred baits

For Tench and Bream – sweetcorn, maggots (red), casters, worms, bread flake and boilies (red).
For Perch – worms and maggots. For Roach and Rudd – maggots (red), casters and bread flake.

For Pike lures or a sprat or sardine deadbait. Surface or slow sinking lures are often best, especially when there is a lot of weed around. When deadbaiting I would advise using a float to suspend your bait off the bottom. Usually the Pike will be found in the margins not out in the deep water.

When to fish

Other than for Pike both ponds are really only worth fishing in the warmer months of the year – let's say from mid-April to mid-November - with the best sport usually being from the start of July until the end of September. Choosing when to fish is often more important than choosing how or where to fish or what bait to use. The more actively the fish are feeding the more likely you are to catch them. The more you plan your fishing times to coincide with the fish's most likely active feeding periods then the more likely you are to catch them.

Usually fish catch results are best on warm overcast days. I often check the weather forecast before heading out to fish. On brighter days it is still possible to catch fish if you fish either early in the morning or in the evening. Even on dull days these can often be the best times.

Where on the ponds

On the Members Lagoon it doesn't seem to matter much which swim to fish. But before choosing a swim it is worth taking a look around to see if you can find any signs of feeding fish in any of the swims. Sometimes Tench can be found bubbling away while they search for bloodworms in the silt. The most consistent swims in the past for catching Tench have been those in the south west part of the pond (along the main entry track to the left). See our club website for some pictures of some of the Tench caught at our ponds in recent years.

The best swims on the Roadside Lagoon are usually those about halfway along the bank closest to the road. This is because the weed growth tends to be less in these swims, perhaps because they get less direct sunlight being more shaded by the adjacent trees.

Conclusion - The Ilkley Angling Association ponds are a very pleasant place to spend a few hours fishing and sometimes a big Tench can be the reward for some careful fishing.

Prizes for catches – As part of our ponds re-generation programme in 2019 and 2020 we are offering two prizes each year of a free Ilkley AA annual membership card (for the following season). The two prizes are: one for the largest Tench caught in either of our two ponds and one for the most quantity of fish (of any species, excluding sticklebacks and minnows) caught in a single session. In order to register a catch please email me at davidmartin@ilkleyanglingassociation.co.uk with details of your catch and attach a photo of your catch. Please try to include in the background of the photo something that identifies which pond the catch was made in. Good luck.