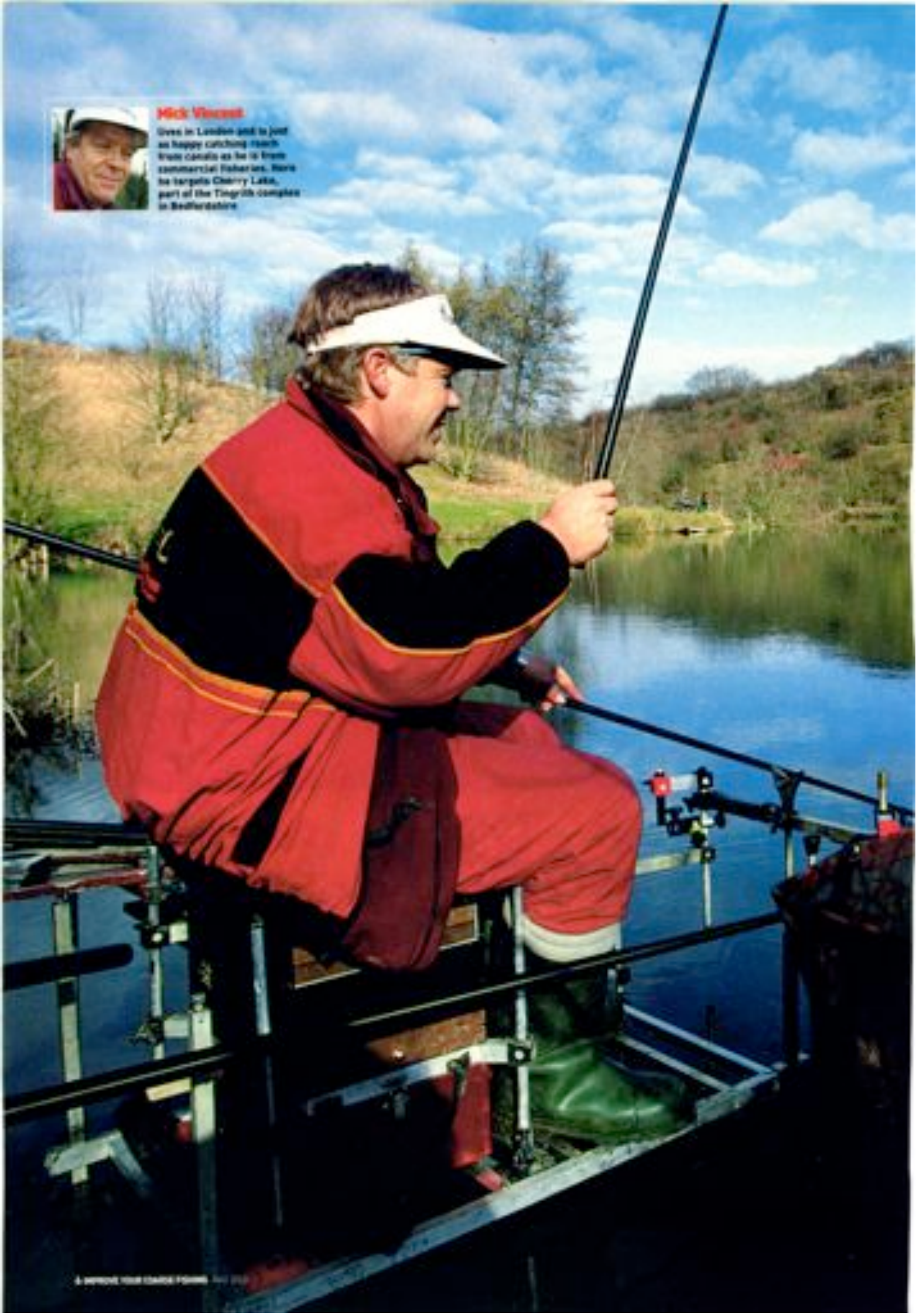




Mick Vincent

Lives in London and is just as happy catching roach from canals as he is from commercial fisheries. Here he targets Cherry Lake, part of the Tigris complex in Bedfordshire



When the carp **won't play...**

The carp don't have to be going bananas for you to enjoy some great springtime sport at your local commercial stillwater. Chances are there's a net of pristine roach to be caught before the carp come out to play. Follow London angler Mick Vincent as he explains the art of caster fishing for commercial pool roach 

ONCE WATER temperatures on your local commercial carp pool tumble and its carp sulk at the bottom of the lake, you might be forgiven for abandoning it until they stir back into more regular feeding patterns, but the truth is you'd be missing out on some wonderful opportunities to bag up exclusively on their often forgotten neighbours, the humble roach.

Roach can offer an exciting still-water challenge on commercial waters, providing pleasure anglers with the chance to hone up their silver-fish skills during the colder months before the water temperature starts to rise again and the carp come out to play.

It's really no surprise why roach can be found in just about any commercial fishery stocked with carp. Like humans, roach are omnivorous and are able to feed upon both plant and animal food! Consequently, they are easily able to adapt to the food available in their environment. Secondly, roach are also able to reproduce successfully in the harshest of environments and unlike choosier species such as barbel, roach are able to spawn on surfaces as diverse as rocks, roots and lilies. Having this adaptability means that even in a crowded commercial pool, roach will thrive while some other species fail.

Take an imaginary look underwater, then, on your local commercial pool and swimming above the carp you'll see shoals of roach, darting around and freely roaming around the lake's midwater layers. One such commercial water is the picturesque Cherry Lake at Tingrith, where to capitalise on its roach potential you'll need just one bait – casters – and an understanding of presenting the bait at the right depth. Mick Vincent shows you how to fill your net with midwater roffins....

The fishery [it's just like your local lake!]

TINGRITH'S Cherry Lake is a rich, stream-fed, 11-acre lake which receives quality water all year round. As a commercial water, one of the main species it holds is, of course, carp, but roach have also flourished here, obviously happy to consume the feed introduced for the carp. It's the same story on countless heavily-fished – and fed – commercial waters across the country.

One big advantage of the pool, from an angling point of view, is that the water shelves down to seven feet quite close in. Having deep water close in means that

it's possible to draw the roach shoals to the margins with loosefeeding tactics. As a general rule, roach on a densely-stocked commercial fishery are hungrier than those on wilder waters and are usually more confident feeders. Swim selection, though important, is not an over-riding feature here. In fact Mick – twin brother of England International Dave Vincent – reckons he could catch from any part of the lake, such is the density of fish. He selects a swim with seven feet of water just two or three metres from the bank, on the western

The bait

CASTERS are the only bait Mick uses on Cherry Lake. Quite simply, they select the bigger fish. Buy the best-quality casters you can, and remember that you might need to order them several days in advance from your tackle dealer.

The casters should all sink and there should no 'skins' – dead maggots. If in doubt, cover them in water at home and remove the floaters. Fifteen minutes removing any skins will also be time well spent. Once cleaned, pop them in a clear polythene bag again and knot it tightly to prevent any air getting to them and they'll be perfect. Store them in the fridge.

Maggots will bring bites but will tend to attract the smaller samples. He baies the bait through the blunt end with the point protruding just slightly. If none float,

simply remove a handful and allow them contact with the air for an hour or so – they'll soon become floaters. Tip the rest into a baitbox and cover them with water. Don't throw the floaters away – Mick uses these as hookbait. Once they have a hook inside them, they will sink slowly, just like his loosefeed – perfect for fooling a wary quality roach. He'll use just a pint of bait



A pint of casters is all you need, but make sure they are good!



Remove the darkest floaters and use these for hookbait.

The tackle

- **Hook:** Size 18 Preston PRC4 is Mick's favourite hook for caster work. It's a medium-gauge-wire hook which Mick likes because of its wide gap. This ensures a high bite-to-fish ratio because it occupies a lot of the inside of the caster when hooked.
- **Pole:** About 11-metre metre pole is all you need. Mick uses a Browning 910, but when the fish are really confident you can catch much better with a 7-metre or 4-metre whip fishing line-tilland.
- **Line:** Mick uses 8lb Green Browning Constan line straight through from pole tip to hook.
- **Line:** He uses No3 plastic which should be able to cope with any bonus chub that come along.



The rigs

With the possibility of catching close to the bottom and up in the water, it pays to have several rigs set up. Today, Mick has three, allowing him to fish at three different depths.



1gm Desquai Alban float

This is Mick's starting rig with the caster hook-bait just touching the bottom

4No10s
6No10s



0.3gm Desquai Alban float

This rig is for when he starts getting bites on the drop. Notice how the shot are strung out shirt-button style

4No10s

No10



0.1gm float

A delicate rig for fishing much shallower. This rig will sometimes tempt the largest roach

6No10s

Rig ONE

This has a 1gm Sensas Alban float. The float has an elongated body

blending into the antenna for maximum sensitivity, with a wire stem. The rig is weighted with a bulk of five No10 shot, a third of the depth from the bottom of the lake, with six No10s spread below the bulk, with the last shot just four inches from the hooklength. The float is set so that the tail is just touching the bottom.

This is Mick's starting rig but he knows that after catching a few roach, they are likely to move up into the water.

Rig TWO

For fishing at mid-depth Mick would then change to a lighter 0.3g float – still a Sensas Alban – with the same main line and hook as the deeper rig, but this time there are four No10s equally-spaced between float and hook. This is normally described as 'shirt-button style', and again there is a No10 as a final dropper shot, just four inches from the hook. This time the float is set so that the distance between it and the hook is around half depth.

Rig THREE

If bites dry up in midwater, then the final option for the upper third, is a sensitive handmade 0.1gm float. This float has a diamond-shaped body and a wire stem and fine wire bristle. It takes just five No10s, spread out every five inches.

With all three rigs, Mick has around two feet of line between pole tip and float, so their total lengths are all different. On calm days this two feet can be shortened to as little as six inches, allowing you to hit bites faster.

Rig tip

Always make sure you have at least two identical rigs. This way you can change over quickly if one rig fails.



So which rig is best?

IT CAN be confusing choosing between a bulk and a string-out rig. The best rig would be one that indicates bites positively and provides the best bite-to-fish ratio.

The bulk rig is the one to start off with. The line straightens out quicker and therefore the bite is shown much more directly than if it were falling through the water. The problem with this rig is that often the roach become more wary and 'feel' the bulk as

they take the bait, so the on-the-drop rig has to be used. And when they rise up in the water, as usually happens, the midwater rig comes into its own.

Eventually, the fish might move up to within two-foot of the surface and if you look carefully you can even see dark shapes and flashes of silver as they twist and turn to take the casters. That's when the tiny 0.1gm rig comes into play.



Another quality 'baffle' for one half of the Vincent twins.

Where to fish

EVEN commercial roach are shy fish. If you are faced with a busy lake, head to the quietest corner of the pool. Sometimes you'll find that the fish have retreated to the part of the lake with least disturbance. Remember also that they are sensitive creatures and as a shoal fish, a pike moving into your swim might send the entire shoal scattering away. Not normally a problem on commercial stillwaters, pike can, however, be troublesome on more natural and established lakes. The secret to a good catch is keeping in contact with the fish and that might mean adding or removing extra sections of your pole and moving away a metre or two from the led area as well as altering the depth.



React to the weather

THE beauty of roach fishing is that they will feed even on the harshest of conditions. Mick has caught up in the water even when it's freezing cold. However, the clarity of the water does also play its part. There has been quite a lot of rain before Mick's session today and this has made the water a little clearer than usual. The fish are a little shyer than normal and less keen to bite confidently on his positive bulk rig.

The feed

MICK mixes up half a bag of Saxon Roach groundbait (below) at the start of the session and casts in a few balls simply to attract fish into his swim. An alternative is to introduce a pint or so of hemp, also by pole cast. The idea of both of these is to 'kick-start' the swim, to provoke the interest of the fish and hopefully to get things moving quickly. If, after this initial feeding, he hasn't had a bite for 20 minutes he will move further out.

After that, it's a case of 'drip-

feeding' a few casters every couple of minutes which usually has the effect of bringing the fish up in the water as they try to get to the bait first.

Don't think that the bigger fish will remain at the bottom, however, as the larger fish in the shoal will move up in the water aggressively to beat the smaller fish to cascading bait.

Too far up in the water, though, and the fish can get too wary, snatching at the bait and resulting in missed bites. A bigger pelocap filled of bait will then have them darting back down again. Trial and error is the key. Try feeding a little more, a little less, more frequently, less frequently, until you find you are catching best. The closer in you can get bites, the quicker and easier it is to catch, so Mick aims to catch just seven or eight metres from the bank.



Give the fish time enough and you can't miss a bite.



What happened on the day

COVER the five-hour session a pattern does emerge. At the start there's a flurry of bites from small roach of just an ounce or so which come to the bulk, bottom rig.

Mick's response is to increase the feed slightly while also switching to the short-button midwater rig. True enough, bigger, more aggressive fish have moved up in the water and he has a consistent run of roach of around 12oz. After this flurry of bigger roach, bites dry up, so he introduces more feed and he moves back to the bulk rig. He switches depths and the immediate result is a beautiful, prime roach of just over a pound.

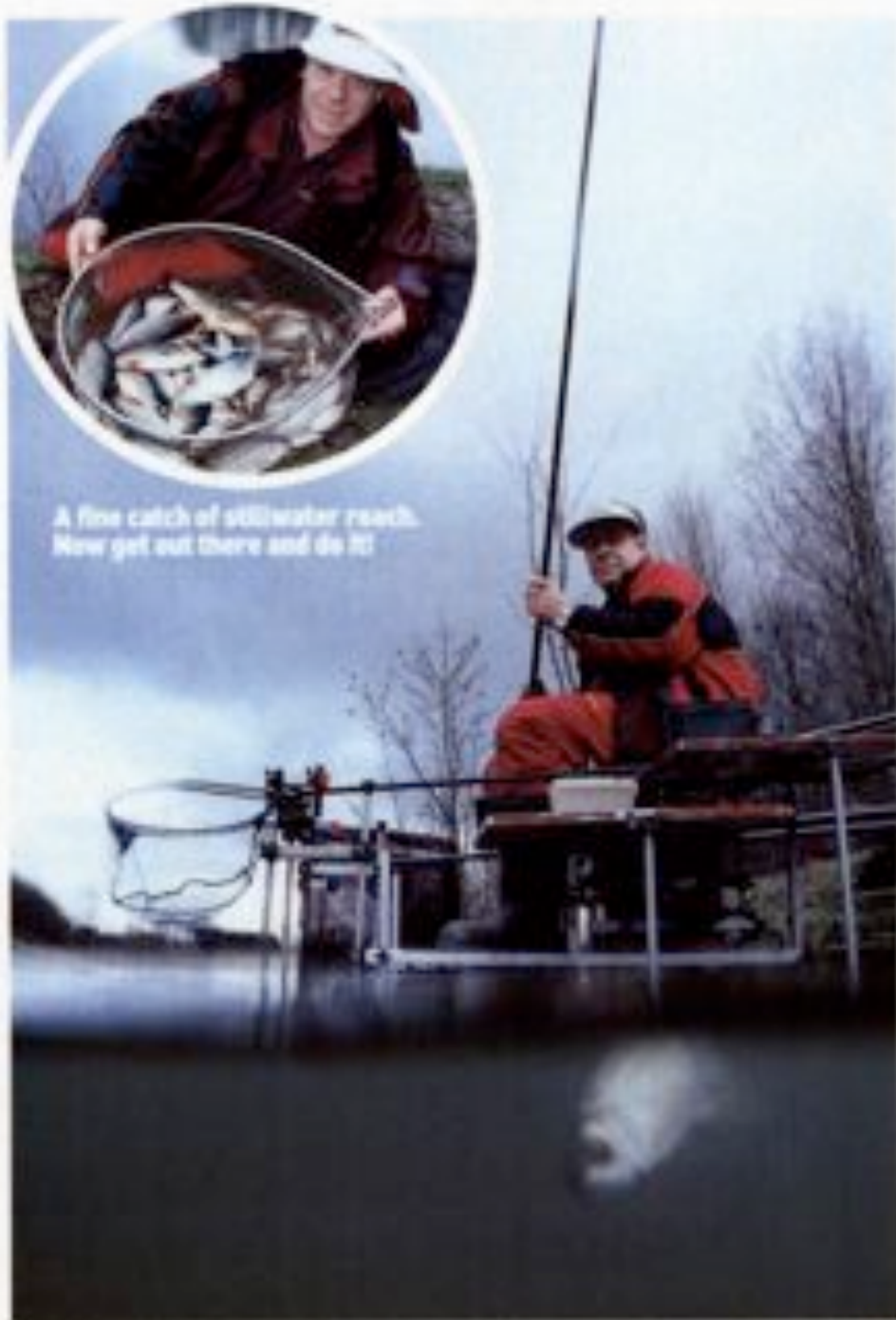
Bites come at pretty regular intervals, but there are still plenty of occasions when the float dips and Mick lifts his pole without connecting into fish. He blames the increased clarity of the water for the obvious wariness of the fish, and compensates for this by shortening the length of line from his elastic to the float, so he can hit the bite fractionally quicker.

Throughout the session there are periods when bites dry up, but by altering the depth and feeding more or less heavily he stays in contact with the fish. The very light rig is not at all productive – the fish are obviously a little too suspicious to come right up to the surface.

He catches quicker when a breeze ruffles the surface, but when a series of squally showers run in from the west bites slow down and at three o'clock it's time to finish. The club he was expecting haven't turned up, but who's complaining at a splendid roach bag of over 15lb? 🌟



A fine catch of stillwater roach. Now get out there and do it!



FISHERY FACTFILE

Cherry Lake, Browning Tingleth, Bedfordshire

There are three lakes to choose at the complex and all offer top quality sport. Fringe lake, next to the cafe, is full of small fish and also holds perch, pike and carp. Both Orchard and Cherry

have a good head of mixed species. As well as the prolific roach shoals there's also some quality early season perch sport on offer. Matches are fished regularly here and it's best to check on swim availability before travelling.

Buy tickets: £7 for one rod.

Rules: No keepnets, barbless hooks only. We hold special permission to use nets for the feature.

Further details: Contact Ian or Ann Freeman, tel 01525 714012.

Email: info@tinglethfishery.co.uk

Directions: Exit junction 12 from the M1 and follow the A5120 towards Flitwick. Take the first left, signposted Tingleth. Ignore the Tingleth village sign and turn off at the second left junction to the fishery.

Facilities: Tackle shop, toilets, cafe.

