

A man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a camouflage jacket, is smiling and holding a large, silvery carp. The fish is held horizontally in front of him. The background consists of dense mangrove trees with green leaves and bare branches.

MANGROVE MEMORIES

THE FINAL ACT

Shaun Harrison

PART 3

It's been a few months since I left the previous piece in this series with the story of my record brace from the beautiful Mangrove Swamp in 2002. The nights had drawn in and winter was well and truly setting in. My next trip could so easily have ended in a much greater disaster than it actually did, and merely writing about it now, some years after the event, sends a shiver down my spine.

I had arrived at the pool in torrential rain in the pitch-black and the drive down had been horrendous. For most of my years of fishing for carp I have had little choice but to have to set up in the dark. Work always dictated that I would arrive at the Mangrove between 8.00-8.30 p.m., regardless of the time of the year. Only during the short summer months did I have the privilege of setting up in the daylight hours. But, if you want to catch carp enough then you have to learn to live with these minor problems.

I drove alongside the last field, making my way down to the pool with the lights turned off in order not to upset any other anglers who may have been there. In fact I went as far as having two extra switches fitted on the dashboard of my Land Rover. That little switch, which allowed me to turn off the brake lights, gave me so much fun with boy racers driving up very tight behind me!

Anyway, back to the story. The dark I didn't mind, but combine it with torrential rain and heavy winds, and even I sat in the Land Rover for a while plucking up the courage to go and launch a boat then load it with nice dry tackle. But, needs must, and soon I was loaded. With my motor attached, and life jacket in place, off I sailed into the gloom of a very dark November night. I headed straight across the pool to the Bench Swim after first sorting where the other three anglers present were fishing (Russell Price – High Swim, Ivan Shipley – Stream Mouth, and Paul Cooper – Lightning Tree).

It's most unusual for me, but my very first job was

to set up
my bivvy
to try to
prevent my
bedding
and
everything

else getting too wet. The problem with having to use boats to transport your tackle is that while they keep water out, they also keep water in, so before you know it you have quite a deep puddle that your tackle is sitting in.

The bivvy was quickly erected and for this winter I had made myself some superb (even though I say it myself) marker floats with tiny red lights fitted. Watching these floats being cast was incredible – just like a firework going through the air. I had started setting up my rods as marker rods for the start of these after-dark trips. I would find my spots by feel, then pop the floats to the surface. Once I was happy with them all it was a simple job to pop back out in the boat to accurately bait them, then back on the wooden islands to substitute the floats for rigs and cast back out to my pole elastic marker knots.

However, this night was to bring me a problem I hadn't anticipated. My floats were all up on the surface and awaiting a scattering of bait. I stepped back into the boat and was quite surprised by the amount of water in there, but didn't really give it a second thought. I motored out to the first spot with the aid of the silent electric motor and moved forward to position myself to bait up. Suddenly, the boat lurched to one side as a huge amount of water rushed forward inside the boat. I always used to be paranoid about shining lights at night, but would always (and still do) slip a headtorch over my head to be worn around my neck in case of emergencies in the dark – and

this was an emergency! I flicked on the light for the first time since arriving and was shocked to see just how much water was in the boat – I honestly hadn't realised, what with not using the light to step into it. The water on the outside was very close to coming over – I was quite literally sinking! As carefully as I could, I stepped to the middle of the boat to try to level it up and then had to make the decision whether to take the short option back to my staging to be stranded, or gamble on getting back to the car park from where we launch the boats, for dry clothes, etc. There were three others on the pool so I opted for the latter and opened up the motor to head back to dry land for another boat.

Halfway back I was sure I had made the wrong decision, the boat was full of water and the outboard was really struggling with the extra weight. I was convinced I was going to have to take a dunking in a cold wintry Mangrove. I managed to get out of my wellies to make swimming easier, but daren't take off my coat as it would mean removing the life jacket first and it seemed as if I was going to be under at any stage. The battery from the motor had already been lifted onto the raised part of the boat and I really didn't know if I should be worrying about a big leisure battery connected to electrics – my mind was in total turmoil.

After what seemed a really lengthy crossing, the boat finally hit the bottom of the Mangrove in shallow water and I was able to simply step out and paddle ashore. The main panic was over. I

had very cold
feet but had
escaped total
immersion and
my battery and
motor had been
spared. My
spare clothes

bag was quickly raided and I soon had another boat rigged up with my motor, and went back across to start angling.

I would like to conclude this with the story of the big fish I went on to catch, but alas, I blanked! We don't have it all our own way and sometimes we very much have everything against us. I did make up for it on the following two trips though, managing to catch each time.

My last trip of that year was on December 10/11th, again, arriving in the dark but this time to find no one else there. Hardly surprising really, it was bitter cold. My pool at home had received its first ice covering of the year as I had left for work that morning and very strong easterly winds literally cut straight through me as I stood looking out over the dark, lonely pool.

I had set up on the Lightning Tree staging to try to avoid the full blast of the easterly wind. Food packages for this trip were merely small PVA bags on each rod because I saw little point in offering more than a mouthful in these conditions. So, with four tiny food parcels sitting out there, all on productive spots, I set about erecting the bedroom for the night. Frost had already formed on the platform by the time the bivvy was up and the person in the nice warm radio station was telling everyone to stay indoors and keep snuggled up in front of the fire as the wind chill would be -7°! 'You're telling me' I thought, 'you want to try sleeping in a single-skin shelter in it with the wind howling under

With my motor attached,
and life jacket in place, off
I sailed into the gloom of a
very dark November night

Cold common – it was absolutely bitter!



My home-made marker floats with a red bulb filled.

the bivvy as well as on top of it' – oh, the joys of winter fishing on tiny wooden platforms.

Eventually I dozed off into the land of big carp and beautiful ladies. Had a weird dream about catching a seal and this Eskimo lady came wandering up to me. Ooops, wrong magazine! At 8.30 a.m. the following morning I had finally made up my mind that I had, in fact, gone insane; I had to be, sitting here doing what I was doing – which was surviving the elements watching motionless bobbins. Suddenly, one pulled up to the rod as if in slow motion and the rod tip started to bend down to the water. I skidded my way to the rods and found myself playing a real peed off fish. I was absolutely freezing playing that fish, and ended up having to go back into my bivvy for a warm and extra clothes before I could even think about lifting it onto the mat and unhooking it. To quote from my personal diary:

I was in pain with the cold whilst sorting out the common and had to sack it for a short while as I was unable to bear the cold wind on my wet hands. Ice had formed on the mat as soon as I wet it. A true winter carp – I wish I had my thermometer with me – it's bloody freezing! Wind chill of -7° it said on the local news.

Well, that was to be it as far as my Mangrove fishing for that winter was concerned. I had other things to do. I had just purchased a bit of land at the side of my house, from where several different businesses had operated in the past. I had started to become annoyed at being awoken in the early hours by the comings and goings of the house sign people who had been based there during the last few years. They moved out and the place came up for sale, so that was it, I decided to knock the fishing on the head while I

removed my existing garage and shed and completed a bit of building work to make the units accessible from the rear of my property and make them look like they were/are part of my property. So, although I have always loved my winter fishing, I gave it a miss for the rest of that winter. Well, that was until the beginning of March, when once again I returned in the dark to see what prizes this magical pool could offer.

After driving through several downpours on the way, then spending time chatting and catching up with Russell on the High Swim I once again loaded my boat and headed to where I had left off on that bitterly cold day the previous December – Lightning Tree. It must have been around 10.30 p.m. before I got the baits out, then came the task of erecting my house for the night. Eventually I slumped into my chair, opened a bottle of red to celebrate my return to angling,

Shortly after dealing with these fish I was in again and, again, a really heavily-slimed fish similar in size to the other, rolled into the net

and settled down to read a book called Facing Up by the youngest person at the time to climb Everest – someone I had never heard of then, but someone who, within a few years, would be on the television every time I channel-hopped – Bear Grylls.

Eventually, I climbed into bed and slept quite contentedly until first light. I opened my eyes and peered out into a rather uninviting, dull, miserable morning. I rolled back over and stayed in bed. It felt so nice not to have to get up and start work.

7.00 a.m. and I had to get up, one of my baits had been found and soon I was playing a fish.

Only seconds later, another rod was away. I remember standing there on the stage with two rods bent round, chuckling to myself 'welcome back to the Mangrove!' From what Russell had said there had hardly been a fish caught since I last fished the place.

Eventually, I had two mirrors safely netted. My first welcome back present weighed 32lb 6oz, and the other one went 18lb 12oz. I was rather alarmed by this second fish though. The 18-pounder was covered in a really thick, white mucus slime. It had certainly been fit enough to scrap hard, but it looked in a really poor way. Obviously it had been laid up for quite some time.

Shortly after dealing with these fish I was in again, and, again, a really heavily-slimed fish similar in size to the other, rolled into the net. The 32 had been OK, but the two smaller fish were literally covered in slime. I chose not to weigh this fish but felt I should photograph it for possible future reference. I had never seen carp like this.

I did stay on another night and, at 7.00 a.m. the following morning, I hooked another fish but it managed to get off soon afterward. Before I knew it I was back in the Land Rover and driving the two hours back to work.

Unbeknown to me at the time, this was again going to be my last trip for a while. That weekend I was at the Angling Publications' Five Lakes Conference in Essex, when I received a telephone call from Mangrove member Jim Kelly telling me he had found four dead carp and several were floundering and in a pretty bad way.



32.06 – welcome back!

I went over to have a look myself that week and the margins were full of sick-looking carp. Many were covered in the same white mucus as had covered my captures. There were also more dead bodies and it looked as though the otters had been dragging them out. The fish were obviously not well. I drifted my boat right up to a couple of them and they merely watched me, not having the energy to melt away as they usually would. I left the rest alone. They obviously had enough troubles without me annoying them.

I never did find out the cause of the Mangrove fish deaths. I was told that a water further up the chain had lost its roach population to white spot, and the Mangrove carp suffered at times with argulus and carp pox, so at the time

I made a note in my diary that it was probably the weaker individuals struck down by a combination of all three things. The strange thing about it though, I only saw one of the larger fish suffering.

By mid-April the fish had recovered and a few of the members were drifting back on to fish the last couple of weeks of the season. I returned for a couple of nights on the last week of our rota's fishing. I fished the Field Swim and caught four carp, all in tip-top condition, then decided to move off onto another water. This was probably one of the biggest mistakes I ever made at the Mangrove. Richard Seal was left there on his own and experienced an absolutely amazing catch over the next few days, but I will leave him to tell this incredible story one day. All I will say is he caught 31 carp, including two 30s and 19 x 20s, a truly amazing feat of angling. Top angling, and proof that if you get it right – and I mean really right – on the Mangrove, or anywhere else for that matter, the fish will come. That catch, and

possibly some of my winter catches described later, make the Mangrove sound like a little bit of a walk over, but believe me, the carp can be incredibly stubborn and difficult to work out. Many anglers blank on there. To catch that number of fish, which also involved three moves, is quite simply a brilliant piece of angling and is definitely a case of making the most of the situation presented before him.

The 2003/04 season kicked off pretty much in the same fashion as the previous year, and my Chilli Hemp and rehydrated boilie approach

The 2003/04 season kicked off pretty much in the same fashion as the previous year, and my Chilli Hemp and rehydrated boilie approach simply carried on catching fish after fish

simply carried on catching fish after fish. There was absolutely no point at all in further experimenting. Each trip would see action coming to my rods, which may sound rather blasé, but it was how it was and, to be fair, I found myself simply going through the motions and expecting to catch all the time and working less at my fishing. There would be several chances each trip and I found myself fishing different swims simply for a bit of variety. It seems rather pointless writing about each capture as I was pretty much doing the same as I had been doing the previous year and have little to add.

The winter of 2003/04 I had another water that I wanted to fish and spent most of my time on there, but I had vowed that the 2004/05 winter I would spend at the Mangrove and that my preparations were going to start right at the beginning of the 2004 season in the summer. I had a tactic to try, which I hadn't heard of anyone using

before, but I was sure it would work and pay me back big-time come the following winter. My carp brain was back on course, trying to find a different approach to the norm and I was sure my new plan would come off.

It was difficult for me at the time; I was holding down a full-time job at Walkers of Trowell, but also working hard and looking at the possibility of developing a new bait company. I had done quite a lot of background work for a lot of different tackle companies over the years, as well as a couple of bait companies, but

I guess midlife crisis time had arrived and I was wanting to get more 'hands on' with something. I was approaching my 25th year in the tackle trade, longer, at the time,

than most of the big names in the carp market, such as Fox, Nash, Gardner, etc. and really felt I could still offer the carp world something of my own. This was the beginnings of Quest Baits. I'm certainly not going to be turning this into one big advert, but at the time I was treading on quite dodgy ground; I was sponsored and I was employed, but I very much felt like I



Covered in a thick mucus, but it had fought hard!



Richard Seal with a 30lb common – one from his amazing end of season catch.



A 30lb+ common from the summer of 2004...



...another 30lb+ carp from the summer of 2004....



...yet another 2004 30lb+ common to come out that summer.

was going behind everyone's backs. I wasn't sure where I was going, or where I was going to end up with my thoughts and plans of leaving the shop, so I very much wanted to keep my options open. The lying I had to do at the time I hated.

So, what was this plan that was going to bank me a long stream of fish in the winter? I had come up with the idea a few years back but had never carried it out. The winter of 2004/05 would show me if my armchair theory would be as productive and worthwhile as I hoped it would be. Quite simply, I decided I was going to start introducing my winter bait right from the start of the season and feed the carp with it all the way through the summer months but never actually fish with it. By the time the winter period came around the fish would have eaten a lot of the bait and never had any reason to be worried. My plan was to fish the summer as usual with my particle and boilie approach, but during each baiting there would be a couple of handfuls of my proposed winter bait going in too. I was determined to resist the temptation of making a cast with one. I wanted the fish to eat plenty of it and get used to finding it. The bait used for this was what was eventually going to be called Fruity Trifle, although back then it didn't actually have a name, and was yellow as opposed to the red colour I

gave it when I released it as one of the Quest Baits range. As the name suggests, it is a combination of fruit flavours, creams, and an essential oil put onto a base I have used on and off since the 1980s. I knew this bait would be eaten – there was absolutely no need whatsoever to test it out on the fish first. The base mix they seem to love everywhere and I was certain the flavours put into it would be fine, provided I didn't overdo them.

I stuck to my plan all summer, never putting in a lot of the Trifle, but always putting in a little bit on each baiting, along with the odd scattering in areas not being fished.

The summer was again very kind to me, with several more big fish coming my way. I have detailed quite a few captures so won't list them all here, because personally, I find articles with fish after fish after fish being caught quite boring, to say the least.

I had a further plan up my sleeve, possibly quite a selfish plan, but I will let you in on it anyway. From my previous seasons on the Mangrove it became apparent that the place would shut up for a few weeks after the leaves had started to fall in earnest. I have noticed this on several lakes in the past, it is as if the leaves slightly pollute the water and put the fish off the feed for a short time. Now don't get me wrong, I have caught the Mangrove fish during every month of the season, but in my opinion, mid-October through November can be quite an awkward time on there. I had decided that this year I would pack up fishing it in mid-October and let everyone else know why – because it always fishes so badly. What I failed to mention to everyone was the fact that I was planning to come back from Christmas onwards and fish it hard during the time of the year (January and February) which has produced the least number of captures in all the Mangrove years.

I have also noted over the years that a lot of

anglers talk a good story regarding winter fishing, but when it boils down to it they tolerate two or three blanks then seem to melt away until the following spring. If they see a couple of fish caught then sometimes they carry on a little longer, but if they are blanking and seeing little else caught, most would-be winter carpers pack it in. I felt by leaving the place alone through this period then I wouldn't be adding to the problem should I get lucky and catch a fish, which would spur the others on. Selfish I know, but I had a whole summer's work behind me and I was determined to see my plan through.

During the winter the rotas merge, so anyone is free to fish when they want. The Mangrove isn't massive at around 18 acres, but it is big enough, with only a few swims, to make it very difficult to get near the fish if a couple of other anglers are on. I wanted to stand the maximum chance of getting on the fish so at the time didn't even tell my close friends what I was planning on doing.

Mid-October, on what was going to be my last trip, I treated myself to a rod with the winter bait on it. Result? A 20lb 8oz common and a 28lb common! That was all I needed to see. They were definitely on the bait. Now came the difficult part of not fishing despite knowing they were on the bait good and proper and would accept it as soon as they saw it.

I then bided my time for a few weeks, fishing for barbel and chub. My mind was on the Mangrove though. It was difficult to not think about those fish. This year I had done everything I could think of to stack the odds in my favour for catching those fish through January and February.

The week before Christmas I could bear it no longer, I had to go back for a quick midweek session to try to catch myself a Christmas present. Out of bed at 4.45 a.m. and into the preloaded Land Rover for the two-hour drive westward in an attempt to be set up and cast out at first light.



Leaves in the water must mean the Mangrove season was coming to a close.

It looked rather uninviting when I arrived, with strong, gale-force winds seemingly blowing from every direction. I looked in the logbook when I arrived and saw that only two fish had been caught during the last six weeks. It looked like my plan to keep away hadn't such a bad one after all.

I set myself up on the bank behind the High Swim to keep all movement and noise on the wooden staging to an absolute minimum. The High Swim is the only swim you are able to actually set up on the bank. I'd not seen anyone else do this, but it made sense to me. With the foliage off the trees I could see the lake from the bank, so I set up on the bank. I ended up spending the day fishing rather poorly. The wind was really blustery and I couldn't imagine spotting any fish so, by lunchtime, I found myself with my head buried in a book. At least I stayed on the lake rather than clearing off to the pub for a meal at lunchtime as I usually did.

By the time the dark began to descend over the Shropshire countryside I gave myself a bit of a kick up my own backside. I had fished terribly, with my head buried in the book rather than looking for the slightest glimpse of a fish. I made a cup of tea, got out of the bivvy and crept out to the rods and stood there willing a fish to show. Cup of tea finished and darkness well and truly setting in, I was just thinking about retiring to

the bivvy for another read when I spotted one. Absolutely nowhere near where I was casting, but I spotted one at extreme range straight in line with the High Swim. I quickly wound in a rod and let launch. Nowhere near! Well, being sorted for every eventuality, I wound back in, took off the spool of 15lb line and put on a spool of 10lb with a shockleader attached. It was properly dark when I recast in the blustery wind. I didn't see it land, but knew it was in the right direction and, more importantly, the lead had really thudded

By the time the dark began to descend over the Shropshire countryside I gave myself a bit of a kick up my own backside

down on a hard spot. I must admit to being quite shocked by this as the 4oz lead I had blasted out into the darkness should have slopped into silt. I have a method of slowing the leads the moment they hit the water, i.e. by pulling the rod back and lowering the lead down, rather than burying it and breaking the earth's crust!

I guess in hindsight I either upset a rather large swan mussel by banging a lead down upon it, or I hit a sunken boat. Either is a possibility. Anyway, at least I now had one in the right sort of area.

10.00 a.m. the following day and I was starting to clear away my gear. I had to be back at work for 2.00 p.m. I was rather disappointed after all the plans I had made for this winter, when suddenly,

the Delkim chirped into life and one of my Shaun the Sheep bobbins looked like he was dropping to the deck for a bit of a feed! In an instant I was on the case and bent into a Mangrove carp. The fight went on for ages, but eventually the Free Spirit Hi 'S' rod and SS3000 reel combination did their job, just as they had so many times before. Soon I was looking at a long mirror with a big tail. At 21lb it was hopefully the start of things to come. Happy Christmas to me!

What a difference a fish makes. I drove back home for a shower before work feeling quite contented with myself. That brief period of actually fishing rather than reading a book had shown me where they were and I was able to do something about it. I felt I had caught that one, rather than it catch itself over a big bed of bait. Big lessons learned.

Next trip was January 1st. I've never been particularly bothered about celebrating the New Year. After the Christmas period I am usually quite keen to get back to some sort of normality. Ruth was of a similar opinion and we found ourselves in bed well before midnight and my alarm clock was set for silly o'clock again.

It went off and I moved into autopilot,



First on Trifle – the best rod 28lb common from the autumn prior to my winter campaign.



Big mirror from the summer.



The High Swim – picture taken between takes on one of my day-only sessions.

kettle on, flask of coffee made to drink on the way there, and off. It was weird, just like the whole world was asleep. No cars on the road, no one. Yet one thing which really did surprise me was the total lack of police cars. I would have thought after all the obvious partying going off into the early hours they would have been strategically placed to pull over anyone who might just risk driving home. Ah well, not my problem.

I was there at the Mangrove and casting out the first rod as the eastern sky started to lighten. I was amazed to find Craig Banks bivvied up in the Stream Mouth when I arrived. I thought I was the only one who wasn't bothered about New Year celebrations!

The wind was awful and, along with heavy rain too, my living conditions weren't quite as pleasant as they could have been. The rod pods blew over, despite me having them strapped down, and twice I had to recast all four rods in case I had dislodged the leads during the pod disasters. I did have a dropback on one rod, but I failed to

connect with anything. I guess the wind could have bounced the lead free from the silt.

Among all the chaos I was rewarded with a 19lb 14oz mirror. They wanted the bait – it was up to me to battle the elements.

Diary Extract

Sunday 2nd January 2005

5.30 a.m. I've had enough sleep. Gales and rain are still beating up my Groundhog. I am sitting writing this, willing daylight to come, although with these black skies daylight is still 2½ hours away. I have just been out to the rods and eased the pressure off the lines – good job really, the left-hand rod was not flicked over to free spool. It must have clicked over the last time the wind dumped the rods on the deck. Hoh hum!

The joys of winter carping! I had made the mistake of allowing myself to doze off too early the night before.

Eventually daylight came and with it the comfort of being able to see more. I recast them all at 10.00 a.m. and at 11.00 a.m. I was into a big fish. It held its own out in the lake for a long while before kiting to my left. I knew what was going to happen, a large willow had fallen to my left and the carp was heading behind that. I pumped as hard as I dare and got back as much line as I could, hoping it would miss it, but suddenly that horrible jerky grating sensation

came up the line as my line started to pull through the underwater branches. Soon it was solid just yards away. I had a boat with me in the swim but in these rough conditions I was rather loath to get in it. I was in a stalemate situation. There was no way I was going to get in the boat without informing someone. I telephoned Craig to see if he would come and give me some assistance just in case anything went wrong. Craig turned up and with life jacket donned, I got into the boat and made my way to the snag. I hand-lined but couldn't feel anything on the end. I carefully slid the oar down the line and could feel the lead but couldn't feel anything live on the end. I'm certain the fish had transferred the hook. Eventually I got the rig back without the carp.

Amazingly, whilst clambering back on the boards I saw the marker knot on another reel shoot past me. So strong was the wind I didn't hear the alarm. A common of around 7lb was the culprit. Not much of a consolation, but a carp nonetheless and, at around 7lb, quite a rare one for the Mangrove.

I left soon afterwards. The conditions were making it rather unpleasant and, after all, I go fishing for pleasure.

January 12th I was back for a single day-only session which would mean four hours' driving for eight hours' fishing. My takes were all coming in daylight hours and if I stopped doing the nights I could fish every week. Doing the nights



Another successful session!



35lb common, one of six fish hooked on the first of my day-only sessions.

was costing me half a day off the following week because of work commitments.

I thought I must be mad as I set off for the first of my day-only sessions, but by the end of that day, after losing a 30lb common at the net, then following it with fish of 20lb 8oz, 18lb, 16lb 8oz, 35lb 8oz and 23lb 12oz by 3.30 in the afternoon, I felt pretty smug with myself!

The next day-only session a 22.04, a 24.06, a 16.09, a 27.07 and another 35-pounder – a mirror this time (the last one had been a common). These day-only sessions were quite enjoyable and my long-term application of the bait without using it for a long sustained period of time was working more than I could ever have hoped.

I returned in February and still the fish came, 25.02 common, 27.00 common, 30.15 mirror. I would like to say these catches continued right through to the end of the season, but alas, health issues saw me suddenly unable to fish for the following few weeks. Having said that, my winter spell on the Mangrove had exceeded all expectations as it was.

Over the years the Mangrove had produced so few fish in the January and February period that any capture was definitely an achievement on there. The long-term introduction of bait had been a idea I'd had in the back of my mind for some time, but like with so many other things in life, I had never got around to doing anything about it. Certainly though, from now on most of

my baiting on any water will incorporate a bit of winter bait just in case...

It was often a battle of the elements on the Mangrove during the winter months but by travelling and only fishing the daylight hours, the gales and the odd frosts we suffered for most of my time there were more than bearable. These days I quite like fishing the days-only in the winter. It can mean a lot of effort getting out of bed at silly times of the night/morning, scraping the car and travelling a long distance, but when the water has worthwhile rewards and you have done everything you can to stack the odds in your favour then this effort is certainly made worthwhile.

The summer of 2005 was practically written off for me fishing-wise. I was working every hour possible doing background work towards what was to eventually become known as Quest Baits. I

unable to get over to this magical place.

Work totally took over my life and I threw everything into this that I possibly could. By keeping my brain totally absorbed in this and I didn't notice the fact that I was hardly getting out.

Finally, in 2008, I decided not to renew my ticket. This was an incredibly hard decision to make. I was paying a fair bit of money for tickets but was unable to fish most waters due to being a dog owner. I had thought I would be a Mangrove member for the rest of my life but alas life's situations and circumstances move on.

This year I really have got my fishing head back on. I have joined a water where Brook my Staffy can come with me and it's enabled me to get totally focused on my fishing again. The last summer has been a great one for me fishing-wise, but this is obviously another story for another time.

I would like to finish this series with a massive thank you to Tim for allowing me to join in the first place, the Gwilt family for making the water

I would like to say these catches continued right through to the end of the season, but alas, health issues saw me suddenly unable to fish for the following few weeks

was still holding down a 9.00-6.00 job at Walkers, but had decided to make the leap from 25 years of regular employment into the unknown world of working for myself. I knew I wouldn't get much chance to fish this year, but little did I realise how little opportunity I would get over the next few years.

I remained a member of the Mangrove for a further three years, but hardly managed to fish the place. I had become single during this time, and with a complete lack of dog-sitters I was

available, and definitely not forgetting the rest of the syndicate who made my fishing at the Mangrove such a pleasurable experience. The fishing on the Mangrove is split into two rotas and I would struggle to put together better rota members than those we had on ours. Thanks lads – a special place and time in my life, made even better by all of you, although I have to say, the winter I have just written about, each trip I prayed that none of you would be there!

Best fishes. **SC**



My lucky Shaun the Sheep bobbins.



30.15 mirror making three 30s in three trips – the armchair theory was working incredibly well.