

VENUE FILE

HARTLETON LAKE**(Drummonds Dub)****Location:** Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire**Postcode:** HR9 7UA**Day tickets:** £6 on the bank**Contact:** For open matches ring Andy Prosser
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ANGLER FILE

IAIN SWANSON**Sponsor:** Willis Worms**Pole used:** Garbolino Super G10**Major achievements:** Welsh Youth Team Gold;
Individual Silver medal at Home International

There's no reason why breadpunch shouldn't be used on natural lakes, and former Welsh youth international **Iain Swanson** shows you how he uses his loaf to catch nets of skimmers at Drummonds Dub.

As a boy, I was lucky enough to live about 200 yards from a prime stretch of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal in South Wales, where I grew up learning to fish 'traditional' baits such as breadpunch and casters for roach and skimmers. I went on to do very well in the open-match circuit on the canal, which at the time was thriving. Bread was crucial to my success then, which is why I developed and adapted this tactic for other venues, including stillwaters like the one I'm on today.

I'm on Hartleton Lake, or Drummonds Dub as it's more affectionately known, which is a large stream-fed lake just outside Ross-on-Wye in south Herefordshire. The colour on this lake is very changeable. It has a very silty bottom that can quickly colour the lake up if we've had a lot of rain and the stream that feeds it is carrying water. The depths are perfect for fishing bread, with it being about

five or six feet deep at 12 metres. If you catch the lake on form it's capable of throwing up massive weights of skimmers and tench, with 50lb nets not uncommon. However, as a realistic target on most matches here, you're looking for around 20lb to be in with a chance of a placing.

Most people who fish Hartleton use a pellet-based approach – expanders over a base of 4mm dampened feed pellets. When I first saw Hartleton I took a long, hard look at the water, the target fish and the environment they're living in. Firstly, as the lake can be heavily coloured, you need a bait that will stand out visually. Secondly, the target fish are skimmers from 8oz to 1lb with the odd bigger bream and large tench. Thirdly, with the bottom being so soft and silty, you don't want your bait to disappear. To me, all of these factors say one thing – breadpunch!

The rig I use for this lake is a little different to my usual canal breadpunch approach, as normally I'd string the shot out for a slow, gradual drop through the water, making it look as natural as possible. However, at Drummonds Dub there are huge numbers of small roach in the lake that would tear baits to pieces before they reached the bottom. For this reason, I use a 0.3g Sensas Parma float shotted with a bulk of No8 Stotz about 10 inches from the hook. I also use a size 18 Kamasan B611 hook on a 0.10mm hooklength to a 0.12mm Silstar Match Team main line. The float is dotted down to a pimple as I want it to go under as soon as a skimmer has the bread in its mouth. I also use a touch of float bristle-grease to allow it to barely hold above the surface.

I've recently become a fan of double elastic, and have found that a doubled-up Vespe No5 is perfect for the job here. It's forgiving enough to set the hook into the soft mouths of skimmers but also gives you a fighting chance of getting the resident big tench in the net. I feel that if I went purely for a No5 or a No6 straight through then, although this would be spot on for the skimmers, you wouldn't stand a snowball's chance in hell of catching a big tench. Likewise, if you upped the elastic to a No10 latex or heavier, you would bump most of the skimmers off. I also carry a doubled-up No4 in case they're finicky and a doubled-up No6 in case the bigger fish turn up.

As with anything, preparation is key and for my bread fishing it's all done the night before at home in the kitchen. I prepare two different types of bread for the hook punch. »



Iain Swanson has been having success by fishing with bread on a pellet-dominated venue.

For the first one I trim the crusts off a slice of extra-thick loaf, then hold it above a boiling kettle for about 10 seconds to allow some steam into the bread. This is then rolled out with a rolling pin and wrapped in clingfilm ready for the following day. A tip here is to cut the rolled slice into four pieces as once it's exposed to air on the bank it tends to dry out very quickly. This way you're only using a small slice at a time and keeping the rest fresh. The other type of bread I use is a standard sliced loaf with just the crusts trimmed, giving it a much softer and fluffier texture. Each type plays its part and it's essential that I take both with me to cover all eventualities throughout the day.

I also make the groundbait the night before and cannot overemphasise how important it is to do this. The consistency of the mix needs to be perfect, and to do this effectively it has to be done in advance. If it's mixed too wet, the groundbait won't disperse quickly enough and will sit ineffectively in the silt. If it's mixed too dry, it will break up too quickly leaving a cloud up in the water, attracting only shoals of small roach into the peg. This is why it's essential to get the mix right the night before as you can take the time to make sure it is perfect and not rush around on the bank wasting time. My groundbait mix is a 50/50 mix of brown breadcrumb and Bait-Tech Expanda Gold. The skimmers at Hartleton like fishmeal so that's why I use a blend of bread and crushed fishmeal expanders. Once mixed, it needs to be riddled three or four times until you have a lovely fluffy mix that will bind with a gentle squeeze. When this is cupped in it will sink before exploding about a foot or two off the bottom, laying a carpet of bait for the skimmers to home in on. It takes a bit of practice to get it right, but this is a crucial area and has to be correct to achieve the desired results.

Plumbing up is also an area that needs to be done carefully. I very gently lower the rig in so that the light plummet I'm using



Relatively large punches are used to create bigger hook baits.



To regulate his feeding, Iain uses a cut-down syringe to create nuggets of groundbait.



At Drummonds Dub there are loads of fish in this size bracket.

doesn't sink into the silt and give you a false depth reading. I plumb to dead depth, which is always the starting point that you

The skimmers can also be flighty feeders and the steamed bread will stay on the hook for a few missed bites; with normal bread you'd be shipping in and out and wasting time. However, on the flip side, if I find that I'm bumping skimmers or striking into nothing I'll have a few drops with the standard bread that hasn't been steamed and rolled. This, being a lot softer, gives more of a chance that the hook will set as the hook will pull through it more easily.

Once I've got four or five skimmers in the net the small pole-mounted pot goes on. It's at this time that I believe they've settled over the groundbait, and they need to stay there. Every put-in after that I cup in a small pinch of groundbait, using a groundbait punch for consistency; again, though, I don't cup one in on top of the other every time as this could be detrimental to the swim. Not only would it create a mountain of feed, it could also concentrate the feed too much, resulting in liners, foul hookers and spooked fish. I vary the feed within a 3ft area to spread it out and counteract those problems. This should result in more positive bites and more fish in the net.

Drummonds Dub tows and very often changes direction throughout the day. When this happens – and inevitably it does – the skimmers can often drift off in the tow. If I feel that this is the case, after the bites slow up or I catch a few roach, then I'll top up with another golf ball or two of groundbait to get more feed down there and bring the fish back into the peg.

If I was still catching skimmers, however, under no circumstances would I introduce

such an amount of feed. Bulk feeding on top of a shoal of feeding fish can be disastrous and should never be practised in this situation. In the same breath, however, small top-ups through the groundbait punch and pot are essential to keep the feeding skimmers in my swim.

Bites on the bread are normally good, but one thing that you must not do is strike too fiercely. I see far too many anglers wildly striking with the pole and either ripping the hooks out of the fishes' mouths or totally missing the bite and ending up with tangled rigs. All you need to do is simply and firmly lift the pole and let the elastic set the hook and do its work.

Another tip when playing the fish is keep the pole tip very low to the water. Skimmers tend to twist and turn as you play them, but if you keep the tip low and ship back smoothly using two pole rollers most should end up in the waiting landing net.

As the session progresses, the fish start to get a little more wary of the bread, which is why you should never be afraid of making changes. Simple things such as taking a few inches off so that the bread sits an inch or

Again, it's the little changes you make that could keep the float going under.

two off the bottom can sometimes make all the difference. In a recent match here I was scratching my head after bites mysteriously stopped, so I took three inches off the depth and was back into fish instantly. Little changes like that can make all the difference on the day, so don't be shy to make them.

This brings me on to a second rig that I always set up. Again derived from my canal days, it works in many circumstances. It's the same float pattern but set at around 12 inches overdepth. The bulk shot should just about lay on the bottom with a 12in hooklength lying flush on the deck.

One thing you must do is swing the rig outwards to achieve the right effect. Once laid out, and when the float has set, you need to keep the pole very still, and be patient. This rig has a knack of fooling a few larger fish into feeding and you can use punches of up to 10mm to try and snare a few bonus fish out on it. Again, it's the little changes you make that could keep the float going under.

The constant drip-feeding of the groundbait and the correct rig presentation will see you catch plenty of fish. The bread is

also far more consistent than other baits and you can often keep the bites coming all day when others around you are struggling. As we approach the time of year when the water temperatures start to drop, I believe breadpunch will really come into its own.

With the pellet phenomenon that's happening at the moment a lot of the traditional baits and techniques are being overlooked. However, one thing's for sure: if you're targeting skimmers, roach and tench at your venue, give the bread a try and you may be pleasantly surprised. **POLE**



The spare slices of bread for the hook are wrapped in clingfilm and stored in a separate container.



By using bread and avoiding the small roach, Iain amassed a great net of skimmers.