

# SALMON-STYLE PIKING

## ANDY SMITH LOOKS AT FLY-FISHING FOR PIKE A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY.

**I**n recent years, it's been hard not to notice an increasing interest in fly-fishing for pike. Hardly a month passes by without one or other of the trout fishing magazines featuring the subject in some way or another. However, for those finally taking up the quest and actually getting down to the practicalities of hurling a fly resembling something the size of a starling through the air, it can soon turn out to be the ultimate in frustration and a near impossibility for most!

Some years ago I established that big was generally better... well, for pike flies at any rate! Having had some years catching my fill of jacks, all under the 5lb mark, it was pointed out to me that perhaps the flies I was using were far too small; to the extent that you could well imagine decent sized pike thinking it was hardly worth the effort to chase after it as a meal. That got me thinking and, to prove a point, I set up a live experiment. Having spotted a sizable pike about 10 metres from the bank of my local water, I cast a normal sized commercially tied pike fly across

the fish. I know the fish saw my fly, as its pectoral fins rotated and it moved its position an inch or so, but there was no real reaction. I did the same cast four or five times, covering both left and right of the fish, but again with no real reaction. On changing over to a fly that was easily three times longer, wider and thicker, the reaction of the fish was rather different: within a second of the fly hitting the water the pike accelerated at it like a rocket, engulfing the bigger fly. A few minutes later I had a fish close to 20lb on the bank. A great lesson learnt and one I have repeated many times since. Now, like a growing number of other seasoned pike anglers, I continue to use what most consider to be oversized flies. That said, I am sure many know of big pike being caught on quite small offerings and even being taken on regular trout flies, but I really am of the opinion that big is still better!

Since then I found myself totally immersed and absolutely hooked, to the extent where I find myself often ignoring the trout fishing purely in pursuit of pike. My local trout waters in the Midlands have always had a pike presence, so it's been easy



Standing well back from the edge, yet still in full control of the fly and the take

enough to get into some action without having to travel far. However, as already stated, hurling big flies can be hard work, though really it's a technique that can easily be mastered if you have the right tackle and a little guidance.

### ALTOGETHER EASIER

I found standard tackle recommendations, such as a 9ft 9 weights or 10 weight saltwater fly rods as being the most ideal for this type of quarry. However, pairing these rods with the right line is absolutely essential and so guidance is often necessary

before you part with your cash. So, a 9ft saltwater action rod has become the standard and still remains a fantastic way to pike fish, especially from a boat. However, as I began to explore the rivers around Nottingham and some fairly steep and overgrown banksides, I found the whole idea of a 9ft rod somewhat restrictive and very lacking for me. What I needed here was a rod with more reach, more height, more control and less effort, especially when dealing with oversized flies, all of which I found surprisingly with a 13ft double-handed salmon rod.

Even in ideal weather



13ft rod allows for control and even a change to the fly's direction



Andy with a 25lb beauty



**Top:** 'Catapult cast' for a bullseye target drop at eight to 10 metres  
**Above:** The longer rod offers extended reach over bankside vegetation

conditions, casting a single handed 10 weight rod all day with a six- or seven-inch fly can prove a little tiring, to say the least. Generally, the whole exercise often has even the well seasoned pike anglers rubbing their arms by the end of the day and muttering the words "tennis elbow". However, switch to a double hander and the task of launching large flies into the distance is

altogether easier. I am not saying you will cast any further with this kind of rod, just easier.

Casting with a longer rod gives a much higher back cast and greater acceleration, so there is far less chance of the fly falling into the rough behind. Everyone having a go at casting big flies soon finds out that they do have a major tendency to fall really fast during the back cast and with

great regularity find the undergrowth behind, especially when first launched overhead still full of water.

More than anything, however, the longer rod gives far greater control of the fly in the water without having to stand close to the edge of the bank. Some pike will take well out in mid-water, but my experience is that most will follow the fly right in close and,

more often than not, see the angler standing there and dart away at the vital taking point. I have met too many trout fishermen already that have given up pike fishing because they claim they had never had any luck, never having seen a fish let alone had a follow or take. In reality I know they would all have had a number of substantial fish follow them in only to turn away before the angler even realised a take was





imminent. I wouldn't mind a few pounds for every time I have not been concentrating and lifted off into a new cast only to find a pike leaping out of the water, narrowly missing the fly as I hurriedly launched into a new cast, blissfully unaware a fish was about to take.

When using a longer rod I can stand well back from the water's edge, and that is perfect if the edge of the bank leads straight into a deep pool regularly holding a sizable fish. Here I can drop a fly right over the hole from four metres back, and still have control of the fly in the water and strike on the take. Where needed I can also reach out from behind overhangs and reed margins. I can mend the line over snags and even steer the fly on rivers, just as if it were a small fish dropping back in the current. I find on rivers I often have to use heavily weighted flies, depending on the current, and the longer rod enables control of the depth these flies get to just by raising or lowering its position over the water.

Standing well back so as not to be seen, I have a better view of any approaching predator and will regularly fish the fly right in until there is only about a metre of fly line out of the rod tip. I can then move the fly in such a way as to tease a hesitating pike and, as I make my fly turn on itself and appear to be getting away right over the pike's head, it will generally induce an explosive take.

If you have the luxury of fishing in really clear water you will often see the pike following and actually see the take. It is such a pleasing moment when

## A selection of Andy's must-have/favourite pike flies



## Big flies are easier to cast double handed

you see a trout take a dry, but watching a huge pike is definitely heart stopping. Interestingly, having often watched pike follow my fly in, I have simply let it drop to the bottom, and the pike paused over it for 10 seconds or so before hitting it just off the bottom as it was twitched slightly.

## INVALUABLE

When fishing along the Lincolnshire and Norfolk drains the longer length of rod becomes invaluable. Normally a 9ft rod means having to fish right down at the water's edge, only then to be faced with the prospect of a seriously high bank behind and, as these big flies will not roll-cast, it's an impossible situation other than for a shallow side cast. With the long rod you can position yourself slightly down the bank so as not to show up on the skyline, yet reach to the edge of the water to avoid snags and at the same time leave yourself perfectly positioned for a clear overhead cast. Playing the fish is also easier as the longer reach lends itself to steering the fish away from snags and can keep the fish

up in the water and controlled along to a suitable landing spot.

In difficult overgrown areas, spots where I have an idea pike might well hang out, I can catapult a short cast right along a reeded margin where a normal overhead cast would be impossible. By 'catapult cast' I mean that whilst holding the line and pointing the rod tip at my target area, I can pull back the fly, carefully holding it by the dressing well away from the hook, and I can then easily achieve a cast equivalent to about eight metres, which will be enough to induce an ambush take if dropped alongside a fish hiding around an overhang or submerged log or tree stump.

Becoming proficient with a salmon rod is not as difficult as it might seem, especially as a 13-footer is light enough for some anglers to still use single-handed as they begin to get line out. For the purposes of pike fishing where we are always throwing large flies, there is no need to worry about tricky Spey casting or anything difficult; you only need to perform the basic overhead cast. In fact as an angler comes to terms with the longer length offered by this sort of rod, it can prove to be a fantastic way of bank fishing for trout on the larger stillwaters such as Rutland, Grafham or Eyebrook, allowing for full line control when wading and enabling long leaders to be fished close back to the angler. This kind of rod can be perfect for those trout anglers who suffer from back pain or find it difficult to hold a rod with one hand perhaps due to arthritis. Either way, try it out for trout, especially when the fish are chasing large fry patterns, and prepare to be amazed how easily a full line goes out!

As both hands are used to hold the salmon rod there is no opportunity for double hauling to get the distance, as we would expect when using a normal trout rod. With the salmon rod we increase the distance needed by feeding line into both the forward and back cast, achieved through a couple of false casts, and then shoot the remaining line as normal.

A double hander won't suit everyone, though, and is not something I would normally recommend for use from a boat unless you have a colleague with a long reach net to scoop the fish further out.

The rod itself? Well, my favourite weapon is a G Loomis 13ft salmon rod. It is only rated as an 8 weight, so it is seriously light, but it will handle a specialist pike line perfectly. Personally I find that, with this kind of salmon rod, it often works to pair it with a line one weight heavier than the rod's rating. This loads the rod early, which is important given that you may well retrieve the fly right in until there are just two or three yards of line left hanging out of the tip ring.

## ESSENTIAL FLIES

From my experience in the Midlands, two flies types are essential for pike fishing. In clean clear stillwaters I always favour a fly that imitates something natural like a perch in its design and colour, or something longer that resembles a small jack pike. The same can also be said for rivers, providing the water clarity is there. However, I find that when I am fishing rivers such as the Trent, which more often than not is slightly coloured, something orange, yellow or white does the trick and has returned me a number of fish around the 20lb mark right through the milder winter months. Having said that, my fly box is full of fly colour variations from bright red and white to a dead black and silver.

As mentioned I find that large flies work the best to entice the larger pike, but in practice remember that these larger flies will prove harder to cast without the right setup and perhaps some professional tuition. To get you started, work with smaller flies and then move up! We should also remember that big fish are not always cooperative, so don't give up on using smaller flies through the day, as these often provide plenty of sport if you need to hook up with a few 4-5lb jacks.

**For more advice, casting instruction and help with tackle selection, visit [www.reelflyfishing.co.uk](http://www.reelflyfishing.co.uk).**