

# High altitude carp

Truly wild carp are extremely rare, so why would anyone stock them 1400 feet up a mountain. Mark Parker investigates the mysterious case of the Welsh wildies... ►

Words Mark Parker Photography Lloyd Rogers



**T**HE DICTIONARY definition of 'mystery' couldn't better describe Pant y Llyn: 'any affair, thing, or person that presents features or qualities so obscure as to arouse curiosity or speculation'.

When it comes to wild, remote, isolated fishing lakes, this place is 'The Daddy'! At eight acres, it is secreted on the north-eastern edge of the Eppynt mountains, in the shadow of the nearby peak, Banc Y Celyn.

While there's nothing rare about small Welsh mountain lakes, your curiosity is pricked when you learn that this one is stuffed with minnows, chub and, even more curiously, wild carp.

Considering that Pant y Llyn is nearly 1400 feet above sea level, around a mile from the nearest road and five miles from the closest town, Builth Wells, the obvious question is what the hell are they doing there?

As far as ambiguities go, this one is straight out of the pages of an Agatha Christie novel.

## *"A fish, native to Asia, found at the top of a Welsh mountain, is a head-scratcher"*

A fish, native to Asia, found at the top of a Welsh mountain. It's a real head-scratcher.

And not even Adam Fisher, freelance Fisheries Consultant for the Wye & Usk Foundation, can shed much light on its fishing history.

"The W&U took it on around nine years ago, selling day tickets for the landowner as part of the organisation's Passport system," Adam explained.

"Well-coloured, thick with weed and packed with fish, we know very little about the lake's stocking. As far as the current landowner knows, the fish have always been here, but why remains a mystery."

To take a closer look at this strange water and hopefully put a few residents on the bank, we joined Adam on the mountainside...

### A most unusual fishery

Pant y Llyn probably started life as a corrie lake or tarn. These are common mountain lakes or pools, created when rain or river water fills a concave cutting made by a glacier in a hillside.

Although Adam is not wholly convinced that Pant is a corrie lake, it has definitely had some form of excavation work performed during its life as indicated by a pair of small bitumen dams at one end of the lake.

"These structures add to the lake's strangeness," Adam confirmed.

"The one thing we're not short of in the Welsh hills is rain, so why anyone would go to the bother of damming such a small water as this for irrigation is a mystery.

"There are no crops grown up here, so what

would 'they' be irrigating anyway? It seems more bother than it is worth."

As for the fish stocks, the incongruity is palpable, although there are two wild-carp waters close to Pant y Llyn.

One, which is an 11th century monastery stew pond, is eight miles south at Dderw Farm near Llysven. The second water is a 16-acre mountain lake at Llyngwyn, near Builth Wells. It is understood that monks from the nearby Abbey-Cwm-Hir stocked this in the 12th century.

The common theme with both these waters is that they are close to the River Wye trade routes and civilisation, so the fish were originally stocked for food.

Pant y Llyn, however, is a quarter-mile above sea level and brings a new meaning to the word remote. It's a very odd place to put your larder, unless Welsh monks happen to be part man, part mountain goat!

"The other thing is that most corrie lakes are similar," Adam explained. "They are



Adam Fisher scans Pant y Llyn for signs of carp activity

crystal clear with a smattering of weed and hold trout – if anything – due to the harsh environment of their location.

"Last winter, the W&U offices at

Llanstephan recorded temperatures of minus 17, so up here it must have been minus 20 at least. Yet, these carp came through it all unscathed. ►

You have to go a long way to find a better view from a UK fishing venue

"I'm not sure if these fish are 100 per cent wildies or an ancient hybrid of wildie and king carp, but whatever the reason, they are not just surviving, they're thriving."

### The way forward...

Unlike most carp lakes, where one set of banksticks come out of the ground and another set gets pushed into the same holes moments later by another angler, Pant y Llyn has seen only two fishermen in the past two years! The fish are hardly 'educated'.

That said, neither are they suicidal. Years of eking out an existence feeding on various aquatic bugs, grubs and the millions of minnows that also reside in the lake means they don't know what anglers' bait is.

Another problem was that with no catch returns for a couple of years and following one of the coldest winters on record, would the fish still be there?

With plenty of marginal weed around the lake, the first job for our visiting piscator was to put bait in a few areas, then spend some time walking around, watching for fish.

The first trip yielded a big fat zero.

The second time Adam visited his footfalls spooked a couple of fish, kiting out from the margins and creating an impressive bow wave as they went.

Putting in the usual carp fishing suspects – hemp and corn – Adam found that some of his corn had disappeared during the day, another sign that fish were still around and, better still, they were prepared to feed on his 'unnatural' baits.

Although he fished the float on the day we joined him, the first time he fished Pant y Llyn he did so using standard barbel rods and leger weights.

He also brought along good friend and angling journalist, Nigel Botherway.

Targeting the area where a stream joins, the lads laid a carpet of halibut pellets, hemp and corn, then fished PVA bags over the top.

"The interesting thing was I fished large fist-sized bags while Nigel used tiny grape-sized bags of pellet," recalled Adam. "Nigel had two fish in two casts and I was biteless for more than an hour."

As soon as Adam started using the small bags, he too started to catch. The fish wanted food, but too much in one area seemed to spook them.



Adam's groundbait comprised mushy pellets, corn and mixed particles, all thrown in loose



Carp are not hook-shy but a degree of finesse will boost your catch

## "Fishing three swims produced three or four perfectly-formed wild carp"

The conclusion was that the fish seemed to feed like starlings, flying in, picking up bits off the edge then flying off again.

A very definite pattern had emerged and one that would stand Adam in good stead for upcoming visits.

### Going with the float

To make for a more pleasing day, Adam chose to use the waggler when we joined him.

Using a typical carp float rod and centrepin reel, he combined this with a 4lb mainline to a 3lb hooklink, terminating at a size 14 hook baited with a single grain of corn.

"From my previous visits, it seems these fish are not 'educated' but can be easily spooked, so a little finesse in presentation can go a long way," said Adam.

"Also, as I'm only fishing a couple of rodlenghts out, the use of a centrepin brings a very enjoyable feel to any fight."

Throwing in a handful of his free feed mix – a tin of both hemp and corn and 4mm halibut pellets softened by the hemp/corn juice – the subsequent surface slick created by the hemp and pellets gave Adam a marker to cast his float to.

Feeding the groundbait in a scattering rather than a ball presented the fish with a loose carpet of food – another point his previous homework had highlighted.

As predicted, it didn't take more than 15 minutes before the float dipped violently and line was ripped off the reel.

"The beauty of a centrepin is it is so tactile.

Because you use your thumb or finger as the clutch, it is much more sensitive than even the best fixed spool reel," he added.

Following a very determined, dogged fight, considering the fish's size, Adam soon slipped his prize over the rim of his waiting landing net.

The first fish of the day – a pristine wild carp – was his reward.

Repeating these actions, he ended up fishing three different swims through the day, each one producing three or four perfectly-formed wild carp.

Apart from the click of the camera's shutter, the splash of the fish and the odd throaty bleat from the resident sheep, the mountainside was wholly silent.

This is the beauty of a place like Pant y Llyn. For the meagre sum of just £10, you could have your very own water for the day, catching truly wild fish that have never before seen a hook.

Its origins may be lost in the mists of time but as for whodunit, well, for only £10, it could be you.



### Great British Fishing

To fish at Pant y Llyn, contact the Wye & Usk Foundation on 01982 560788 or see the website at [www.wyeuskfoundation.org](http://www.wyeuskfoundation.org) for more details.

Up to four rods a day are allowed. Rules are no dogs, night fishing or overnight camping, groundbait or keepnets.

The fish in Pant-y-Llyn are so perfect they almost look unreal

