

Gravel Pit Tenching Part 2

The Tenchfisher's Tackle Box

Making the move from canal or estate lake to pursue the larger gravel pit specimens really does not require a lot of specialist kit. In fact you will likely have most of the gear already. In **Part 2** I look at some of the terminal kit I use and open up my tackle box to inspection! Some handy tactical tips are also provided for the gravel pit newcomer.



A Selection Of Pit Floats.



Paul Cook's finest

Float Fishing

You really do not require a lot of different floats for the pits. I use three basic types which are: Polaris or Locslide antennae floats, Wagglers (and insert Wagglers) carrying up to 3SSG and

traditional Paul Cook "Driftbeaters" which are a classic design based on the early green bodied Drennan versions. Great to use these in the margins with a centrepin reel.

Wagglers

I favour the Drennan Crystals, which are very versatile and the insert versions allow you to change tip colour or insert a more buoyant tip if conditions worsen. I use up to 3SSG as the larger capacity floats are larger and help you to get the line well under the surface drift. These floats are fished bottom end only and locked in place with shot. I always mount my locking shot on fine pole silicon tube. I thread two pieces on my 6lb bs main line and this helps not only to move the shot but protect the line.

Tip: Be sure to plumb your swim to gain knowledge of bottom features. I shot the float up to exact weight then simply nip a swan shot on the hook. If you can't see the float (as it is effectively now "over-shotted") move it up the line till you can. No need to cast unwieldy plummets about!

Locslide or Polaris?

Both do the same job and will lock off at the bottom depth, however I prefer the Locslides as the line attachment device is a bit more line friendly. You must be sure to fish these with the appropriate weight or they will not cock properly. I use a small Fox egg sinker as a running float leger rig. You must overcast your swim and tighten up the line to get these floats to function. Once set, its rod in the rest and wait for a lift or sail away bite. Great floats for rough conditions or when you need to get a fair way out. Available in three sizes.

Tip: Place a float stop about a foot above the hook link to prevent the float tangling with the business end.

Reels

I use a Shimano 3000 Stradic GTM loaded with 6lb Maxima. It's a high quality reel with a useful fighting drag. My centrepin is an Okuma Sheffield which is a fantastic pin for about £90 not £200! I see no reason to spend anymore on a posh Young's 'pin'!

Tip; Do find a fixed spool reel with a shallow spool to save loading on masses of line you will never use! You want a mainline that sinks well and Maxima fits the bill even if it is somewhat low tech these days!

Stick at 6lb bs, you can treat the spool with a line sinking preparation or a dilute washing up liquid mix. The last thing you want is unsunk line which will only exacerbate float drift, which is your main issue on big pits. Overcast, bury the rod tip and give the reel a couple of turns. Adjusting the shotting can help especially if you increase the "mid bulk", not simply adding extra shot on the bottom. So if I have locked off with 2AA, I would change this to 2BB and add 2BB to the mid bulk. It works!

Feeders

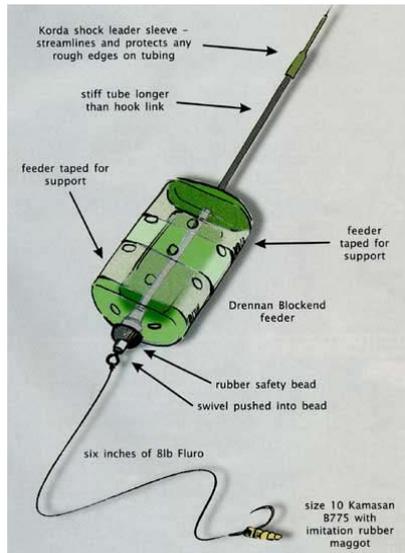


Top Row: 2.5oz maggot inline, 2oz maggot inline, PVA bag heli' rig

Bottom Row: Drennan Method, Wire Cage, Carp groundbait feeder

Pictured above, are the selection of feeders that I regularly use. The maggot inline feeders are made by converting a standard Drennan block end. A hole is bored top and bottom to accept a John Roberts feeder boom tube. If like me you intend using a TFG or Korda sinking leader check tube diameter is sufficient to allow feeder to pull off looped end and "be safe". (For components see the photo in Part 1.) A tulip bead keeps the tube in place at the bottom of the feeder and you should leave top of tube unsecured if you are using a leader. Illustration shows a rig where no leader is employed, the feeder is running directly on mainline.

Tip: Do not use tail rubbers if you have a leader as you will produce a rig that won't be safe in the event of a break off.



*Typical inline feeder rig, running on mainline (no leader).
Cont/2*

These inline feeders are the classic "bolt set up" where the heavy feeder weight acts as a standard lead would in carp fishing. They can be used with a standard hooklink or a helicopter set up. These rigs with short semi stiff links can be devastatingly effective hookers but they are not the only solution to catching tench!

Tip: These feeders empty in about 30 minutes so recasting twice an hour gives you a constant flow of bait in swim. If after that the feeder comes back pretty full then you are in weed and will need to think about your presentation or relocate feeder. Helicopter rigs are more effective in weed. Short links seem to work best on hard gravel bottoms. By short I mean 3" or less.

PVA Bag Rig.

The components for this are a Korda SafeZone helicopter rigged leader to which is attached a Solar PVA bag rig. You will need to remove the plastic core of the inline lead. Solar provide an excellent leaflet to show you how to build this rig. The PVA Korda Micromesh is filled with red maggots and hooked onto the bag clip which is then pushed back inside the lead's internal bore to secure. My favourite lead is a Korda Inline Square Pear. I fish this heli' style with a 6" Amnesia semi stiff link, knotless knotted to a Size 10 Owner C5. This is nicked into the bag before casting. This is a superb rig for weedy venues. If you put a standard feeder on all you are doing is making a weed anchor!

Tip: Make sure you dry lead and clip thoroughly before attaching the PVA stocking or you will end up with a headful of maggots when you cast!
Be sure to buy Micromesh PVA or else your bait cargo will escape in standard boile mesh.

Method Feeder

Much overlooked as it is presumed you need a 3lb TC rod to cast one! Well if you buy a Mini Fox Feeder (about 14g) or a Korda/Drennan 27g you can use them with 1.75TC rods. Just remember not to overload them. I just fill up to the cage rim and do not produce a lemon sized ball! I use scalded pellets as the inner core. The outer is a mixture of CC Moore Stick Mix and the excellent Dynamite Tinned Meaty Marine Groundbait. Prepare to stink for days! I prefer short inline hooklinks with Method feeders.

Tip: When you cast a method you want a slightly upward trajectory, it's kinder on the rod and get it right and it will fly out. A bit like casting a spod I suppose. With the mix you will see a nice oil slick appear as the ball breaks down. Set the alarms on high sensitivity and be aware that you will get lots of liners. If that is all you are getting, think about changing the hook link, longer or shorter till you get a churner! Exciting fishing!!

Do not add live maggots to ball mix or a lot of particle otherwise you will be binding it and lose the cargo on the cast.

Cage Feeder

Simple and tried and tested. Quick to fill with a groundbait and particle mix. Ideal for short range and margin fishing. A traditional feeder which tends to be a bit neglected these days.

Tip: I usually fix a large bore swivel to the nylon link and have the feeder running on the line with a bead buffer. You can also set this up helicopter style for longer casts. However I see this feeder as a short range tactic mainly and I am happy with a sensitive sliding rig.

Carp Groundbait Feeder

These Fox feeders will deliver a large cargo of groundbait and particle. You will need to use a method groundbait mix with these to ensure the contents won't spill out on the cast as they have a large diameter. If the tench are really having it then this is an ideal way to deliver lots of grub

Tip: Best used with a stiffer 2lb TC rod as this is a fairly weighty feeder to cast.

Hook Links

Braid or Mono?

Well my suggestion is not to choose but simply use both! If I want to use a semi stiff link then mono is my automatic choice. Short 3" mono lengths constructed from 15lb Suffix Xcelon or 15lb Amnesia are great hookers when combined with a bolt rig feeder.



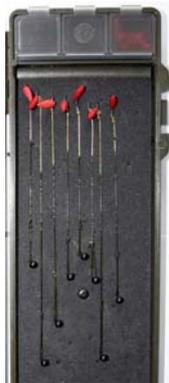
Suffix Xcelon Semi Stiff Links 15lb bs

The Xcelon is matched to a Size 10 Owner C5, and once tied up with a knotless knot you can get the type of aggressive hooking angle without the need to resort to silicone shank extensions. The same goes for 15lb Amnesia, you get fantastic hook turnover with a simple knotless knot. I counterbalance the hook weight with Enterprise maggot artificials. You will

need a leap of faith here as these rigs look very crude for tench and they are! But early season when bigger baits are acceptable these are the business! With Amnesia it is often easier to crimp short hook lengths rather than fiddle about tying them. A set of Wychwood crimping pliers and crimps will do that job for you. I do not bother with swivels and tie in a simple figure of eight loop for loop to loop attachment.

A Finer approach

If I am using smaller size 12 and 14 hooks then my choice without exception is Suffix Camfusion 10lb bs. This coated braid strips easily and has an unobtrusive finish. It lies flat (you should tank test all your rigs) and does not need steaming with very little memory. The combi rig adds confidence in that braid tangles are a thing of the past and you have a superbly reliable set up. Full marks to Gardner for a fantastic product.



Suffix Camfusion /Combi Rigs

A Look Inside My Tackle Box

You do not need a mass of terminal tackle to go tenching. I use the excellent Korum Rig Manager (fully loaded) and a Gardner Rig Roll. Both are very compact compared to a large Fox Box. Because space is limited it discourages taking excess kit and takes up little room in the ruckbag.

Tip: Be ruthless about what you take and get everything organised in multi partition boxes. Surplus larger items such as spare feeders can go in the rig roll along with a few spare leads, rig tools etc. Otherwise everything else is in the Korum box. You do not need to drag 4lb of leads around with you! So cut those back as a first priority!



Korum Rig Manager. A place for everything, and everything in its place!

A varied hook selection that include my favourite : Owner C5, Drennan Barbel, Drennan Super Specialist, Kamasan B981, Korum S4, Fox Series 2B, Pallatrax, ESP T6/G4, Fox SSBP. Drennan Specialists are not really suitable for knotless knots or coated braids as the eye diameters are too small. I use these with a very fine Fox uncoated braid like Megasilk using a whipping knot.

Majority of the terminal kit is Korda. Two rig boards hold all my mono and combi hook rigs all set up with artificial Enterprise maggot(s) to give a neutral buoyancy. On the lower level is the excellent Solar Quick Change PVA bag system.

Tip: Getting organised saves much time on the bank especially if like me you are mainly doing short day sessions.

PVA, Flexibility In A Tube!

If its weedy then I think it's time to abandon the feeder (or weed anchor!) and set up a PVA rig.



You have the choice of bags or the mesh type on a tube. I do prefer the mesh tube as it is less fiddly to set up and you do not get the problem of trapped air causing the rig to float. For maggots the Korda Micromesh is brilliant albeit the PVA is not inexpensive! But it does give you the opportunity to present a cargo of bait over weed.

The famous Korda Stick which comprises a compressed groundbait mix is a great addition to any set up. It also allows a tangle free presentation if you are using a standard braid. A tiny stick nicked on the hook is a great anti tangle device. I favour CC Moores Stick Mix and a top up of oily Dynamite Marine Tinned Groundbait. CC Moore Belachan is a great additive too.

Tip; Remember any water based additives will melt the PVA so only used oil based liquids. Do not prepare these too long in advanced otherwise the PVA will get oil soaked and will not melt. In deep water you might need to double bag/mesh.

PVA bags are great if you want to include the lead in the package. The Tackle Box bags are great value and superb quality. Probably the best method if you are fishing in very heavy weed.

Summary

I hope this review will help the newcomer to gravel pit tenching. In reality the method and kit I use is all very basic, I hate complicated rigs and having to sort through tons of bits in a tackle box. These methods catch me specimen tench every season with the minimum of fuss. You have both traditional methods here and some fresher approaches that have been influenced by carping developments. I am fortunate in getting a lot of feedback from my fellow members of [The Tenchfishers](#) which speeds up any new rig developments. You will note that I have not really looked at boile rigs as I rarely use them for tench – except on Sywell which was once a

noted boilie venue. A look at any Carp magazine will put you right there but do pick the simple ones, as you do not need 20 components on each rig!

Enjoy your Spring Tenching

Steve Innes. The Tenchfishers.