

Successful Pit Fishing Tips

The Tenchfishers

The Tenchfishers have over 400 members and many of us fish pits for tench exclusively during the Spring /early Summer period. This has allowed us to accumulate an in-depth knowledge of the best approaches to pit fishing. This guide shares our learnings to help you land those splendid pit tench that reside in those locations.

Gravel Pits Defined

A gravel pit is an open pit mine for the extraction of aggregates. These pits often lie in river valleys where the water table is high, so they may naturally fill with water to form ponds or lakes. Some lakes are formed out of "borrow pits" where nearby aggregate is extracted for motorway projects. Those pits that are not back filled become naturalised and form the angling venues many of us visit. Today these developments have left us with rich weedy venues that produce some first class angling and many specimen Tench. The current record tench was captured from a Middlesex pit and many prized "doubles" (10lb+) are captured from these venues every season.

Choosing A Pit Venue

Typically, acreage can extend from 5 to 100 acres +. If you are new to pit fishing, I would recommend a venue of about 20/30 acres, big enough to hold some specimens but not so large as to compound location issues. This might be a club venue, day ticket or syndicate lake. Many such lakes have a predominance of carp these days but also hold some fine Tench. So, expect to share your space with carp anglers. Large low stock venues demand a lot of time to sort out and if you are only doing two-day sessions a month, are best avoided! If you are making the transition from the river, pond or estate lake, I'd go for a 20 to 30 acre fishery. There are many of these lakes on club books. However choice might be restricted as many syndicated venues today that we share with the carp angler have extended waiting lists currently. But I guarantee there is a club venue that will meet your expectations and at a reasonable cost too.

Location, Location.

Ok, you have selected your venue and can't wait to get started! However even 30 acres is a big chunk of water and needs a bit of work. Surveying a lake can be time consuming but I follow a routine to get just enough information to increase chances of success. You might be lucky and fish a venue with history and named swims that are known for Tench. Yes, that can cut your work down but I say still do the groundwork. Productive swims tend to be those that are fished most often, restricting availability for you. I guarantee there will be other areas of the lake that are less visited, so do not overlook these. I don't enjoy fishing popular swims or having other anglers asking me when I am packing up! I would start by a walk round and use your experience to find some likely areas. Breaking a pit down into 4/5 sectors and find a couple of swims in each. Without annoying your fellow angler try and survey these swims with a marker set up or Deeper. Be aware of weed levels, there is no



Modern technology has made feature finding easier

point fishing areas where you can't land fish safely. Pits can get very weedy by June and you might have to reassess which swims you fish anyway. Classic features in pits include marginal drop offs, bars and areas of even depths known as plateaus. Bottom make up can be gravel, silt or heavy bottom weed. I favour a gravel area close to weed beds. Plateaus are a favourite along with marginal drop offs, especially for float fishing. I do not like smelly black silt, or large barren gravel areas. If you find that very coarse fibrous blanket weed on the bottom (not that green snotty stuff) fish on it as it is a tench larder!

Once you have your target areas, that is not the end of the process. Aim to get to your venue as first light appears and allocate an hour to go walkabout and look for tench activity. Pit tench generally are feeding a few hours after early dawn so you are not losing prime angling time. If you see any signs, then your choice is made for you. Consistent success is dominated by your location choices. This is absolutely critical on pits.

Day Trip or Long Stay Angling?

Pits are synonymous with bivvies and long stay angling efforts. I would not bivvy up on a pit as a matter of course unless distance from home demands it. Ideally you will have a local venue and can day fish it. Try and cover all your selected swims over time and go light so you can move if needs be. Most of my Tench are caught between 0700-1400 so if you get there at 0430 you have couple of hours to look for signs of bubbling, rolling or surface finning. Most early mornings are flat calm and you will see activity most days. If you find a consistent area then you might want to do some "siege" angling and make the lake your home for a few days. However dark hours (apart from very early season) are not that productive and I rarely fish them. So, in reality long stay extends your fishing by only about 5 hours a day. An 0430 to 1700 should be very productive and if not it is easy to move to a new swim without all the encumbrance of long stay kit. I believe "camping" can tend to interfere with your catch rate on a new venue.



Mobility is Key

A rucksack, two rod quiver and a lightweight chair should get you to the swim and helps restrict the amount of tackle you pack! If you are float fishing then your load lightens even more! You are then not so encumbered that a swim move is possible without a sweaty barrow push. Don't set up home till you have genuinely located those tench. You can waste hours pit fishing by simply being in the wrong area. Going walkabout and observing swims at dawn will give you the clues you need to be on the fish.



Baits and Tactics

My first line of approach are natural baits, I rarely use plastic or boilies. In fact, on many venues now plastic is banned. Red maggots, casters, dendrobena, lobworm and corn are the mainstay of the traditional tench angler. Dispensed by a maggot feeder or chopped lob/corn in a ground bait or cage feeder. On weedy waters you might replace the bolt rig/groundbait feeder and fish a PVA stocking in combination with an inline lead. Feeders can be weed anchors. Solid bags have their place in weed too. These are best used with a soft braid hook link.

Needless to say, I always hair rig my baits for best hooking efficiency. Don't use maggot clips. My hair terminates in a tiny oval ring. Maggots are needle threaded on cotton and then tied on to the loop. You can add foam to pop up. Fiddly yes but effective. Worms can be hair rigged too and using a Korum quick stop or a plastic caster as a stop/retainer. You can hair rig chopped worm sections (a kebab rig) or select a whole worm.

Spombs seem to have replaced spods these days and allows accurate baiting at range.

As primarily a day angler I am cautious about the amount of bait going in. If you fish three rods and big feeders you can get through 2/3 pints a session. To

my mind that is sufficient and I have taken big Tench catches on pits with a couple of pints.

Longer stay anglers have the challenge of maintaining the right quantity of bait over a longer period. No action to me is not a prompt to pile in more bait. Impatience can play a part here but you need to view it as you would a day angler. Be cautious as pit tench are very mobile and you can expect long periods of inactivity.

Bear in mind if you are fishing on pits that you need to get the rigs and feed in the same place! Clipping up and marking lines is one way of doing this. Using distance sticks to measure "wraps" (one wrap = rod length, likely 12 feet or approximately 4 metres) saves walking out lines to a set distance and is the vogue way to synchronise spomb/feed rod distance with your bait rods.

Of course, none of these technicalities apply to float fishing where you only need basic competence with a match catapult.

Pack That Float Rod

Specimen Tench are caught this way – in the margins! It is a neglected method these days but can be very effective and is a far more sensitive and revealing method than a feeder. Sometimes late in the season Tench can be infuriatingly difficult to hook up. Sheets of bubbles in the vicinity of bottom rigs but no action. Scaling down to float tactics can put bonus fish on the bank. Tench come in close, very close. I witnessed a capture of a 10lb 6oz tench under the rod tip. So ignore those margins at your peril!

Effort equals reward! Tenchfisher and Drennan cup winner Darryn Stolworthy with a big gravel pit tench.



Measuring Success

We all have our own goals. Be sure they are realistic and reflect the venues potential. Catching Tench on a regular basis on a pit is a success in itself, many pit anglers do in fact fail to do this.

Gravel pits are very moody venues and some days they just don't fish well at all. You need to put in a consistent effort and combined with your research, there should be Tench in your net. If I look at The Tenchfishers catch returns, big Tench of over 9 and 10lb represents just a few percent of total captures, so be realistic in your expectations!

To me any pit Tench is a prize and is hard won. The bigger fish over 8lb create your red-letter days. Good luck with your pit exploits – and I hope this guide puts you on the road to success.

