

# OPEN ACCESS WATERS

SIMON CROW

Premier Venues **YOU** Can Fish!

## Bentley Fisheries Essex

We're heading south again this month as Crowy visits the little-known Bentley Fisheries, an idyllic little pond, perfect for small groups of anglers.

**H**aving covered a few lakes up north and in the Midlands over the last few months, I thought it was time to pay a visit to the hotbed of carp fishing that is Essex once again to see what else it has in the way of open access fishing. There are literally hundreds of carp fisheries in Essex, and I could probably write about its waters for many years to come, but not every one is perfect for this column. I like to cover from the easiest right the way through to the most

difficult, aiming to make this feature as appealing to the serious carper as I can.

In preparation I was straight on the phone to my old mate Scott Grant to get his views on a water called Bentley Fisheries, a small venue of only 3½ acres which sounded perfect for small groups of anglers, and which I'd seen mentioned in Carp-Talk quite a few times. Luckily, Scott had been there a couple of years ago and knew all about it. He'd not been to the water since, but had heard

## Fishery Facts: Bentley Fisheries, Essex



The Point, right at the far end of the lake, nice and quiet with lots of scope.

**History:** The fishery is said to be around 40 years old. The current owner has owned it for the last 11 years, but it was only this year (2009) that he set about turning it into a carp fishery. Prior to this, it was more of a general coarse fishing lake.

**Lake size:** About 3½ acres, with eight purpose-made carp swims.

**Features:** The bottom is clay and gravel, there are two islands, snags, reeds, pads, overhangs, a depth of around 7ft maximum, silt and a no fishing bank.

**Contact telephone:** Contact the owner, John, on 07939 074089.

**Website:** [www.bentleyfishery.co.uk](http://www.bentleyfishery.co.uk)

**Address:** Bentley Fishery, Oaks Farm, Mores Lane, Pilgrims Hatch, Brentwood CM14 5RU.

**How to get there:** Take Junction 28 off the M25. At Brook Street roundabout take the second exit onto the A1023 heading to Brentwood and Pilgrims Hatch. Half a mile on, turn left at the traffic lights into Wigley Bush Lane. Continue for 0.7 of a mile, turn left at Weald Road, then after 0.6 of a mile you'll come to a left-hand bend where you need to take the slight right into Lincolns Lane. A mile on, turn left at Coxie Green Road then immediately 69ft on, turn right at Mores Lane. The fishery is just on the left-hand side, take the second gate.

**Ticket details:** All tickets must be booked beforehand and run from 6.00 a.m. till 6.00 p.m. Only five carp anglers are allowed on the lake at any one time. Only adults of 18 years and over are allowed to fish (no children, even if accompanied by an adult). Day tickets are on offer at £25 for 24 hours during the summer and £20 in the winter. For 12 hours, the price drops to £20 in the summer and £10 in the winter. Winter tickets come into operation from 1st November and run until the end of February.

**Fish stocks:** Carp, roach, a few perch and tench, and a few silver fish.

**Carp stock:** The lake was drained down quite recently and the carp were hand-counted at 104. The owner believes there were a lot of fish still in the silt, so estimates the carp stock to be somewhere in the region of 150. Of these, the average size is around 18lb, with half a dozen fish now showing above 25lb, to a best of 29¼lb.

**Facilities:** There's a purpose-built toilet block with running water, secure car parking, and a great delivery service for takeaways, including Chinese, Indian and pizza places (Scott and I sampled the pizza and it was lovely).

**Rules:** No sacking of fish, no self-prepared tiger nuts, bait boats can be used, and sensible behaviour at all times.

**A good tip:** Tails Up baits work well and is available on site, as indeed are pellets, which are fed to the fish regularly. The owner says the key to catching at Bentley is to get rig placement right, stealthily putting the rods out into close-in spots and under bushes. Snowman setups work well, as does heavy baiting.



### A Walk Around the Lake

Beginning in the Boat Swim, which is the first one you come to down the path, you have a lovely bay to your left where the boat is stored, as well as a nice island to the right. The margins at your feet regularly produce fish, and in the summer there are some nice pads and reeds to the right. Open water often does fish, and here you'll find a depth of around 5ft maximum, depending on the time of year. The bottom is quite uniform out in front. The main feature however is the no fishing bank, opposite which baits fished very tight into the marginal features often do fish. This area tends to be the most productive on the venue and has been the scene of many good hits.

Moving to the right, you come to The Gate Swim where I fished. The margin to the left is nice, with a 5ft depth less than a rod length out off the reeds. The margin to the right is also worth a rod, especially tight up to the reeds or amongst the pads that you'll find there. The island in front gets a lot of pressure, so you need to do something different with your baiting if this is to produce steadily.

Continuing to the right, you come to The Paddock Swims where two anglers can fish. In between the islands is the hot spot here, or just off the corner features, especially close in to any overhangs. The margins are also good, and the right-hand one of the two swims can also get a rod to the back of the aerator, which is in the middle of the lake.

Next up is The Corner Point Swim which has lots of scope. There's a nice bay to the right, as well as a lovely overhang in the left margin that's worth a rod. Don't ignore the open water here, especially when there's some sun out.

Staying on the path to the right, you then come to The Double Bunker Swim, another area with lots of scope in front. You can fish close in under the overhangs as well as to the side of the aerator or even to the main snag off the small island.

Last, but not least, you have Single Bunker, which is on the end of the no fishing bank. You can get in between the islands here, as well as to the side of both, but again, don't ignore the margins.



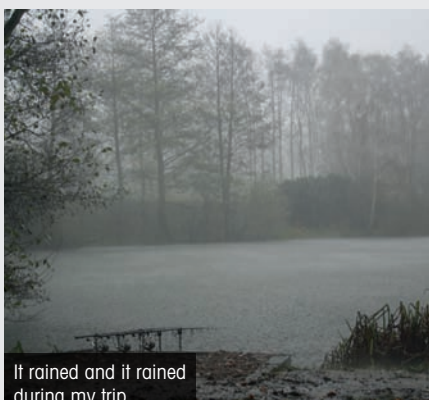
The reeds in the right-hand corner of Gate Swim.



The Double Bunker, well spaced out and perfect for two bivvies.



The view as you look down the path from Boat Swim towards Gate.



It rained and it rained during my trip.



Gushing water turned the fishing off.

The rain was coming down in bucketloads, and as I made my way around the lake for a look there was rainwater making its way down the path from all directions

lots of good reports about it from several of his friends in the area. Apparently it had been completely turned around from what it was when he last visited, lots of small carp and silver fish having been removed in an attempt to turn it into more of a serious anglers' water rather than the runs water for which it was previously known. Scott had landed more than 20 carp during a 48-hour trip, the best just over 20lb, so when he saw one of his mates and asked about its transformation, he was surprised to hear it jokingly referred to as 'The Yateley Car Park Lake' of Essex, in reference to its moody nature.

I'd arranged to meet Scott in the last week

of November, and the weather was what can only be described as very wet indeed. As I walked down to the lake from the car park at 2.00 p.m., he was set up in the first swim along, known as The Boat Swim. The rain was lashing down, but Scott was full of confidence having just seen a carp top close in to a large island to his right.

With a big smile on his face he told me, "There's no way this place is as tough as some of my mates have been telling me. Last time down I couldn't get any sleep because the fish went potty! I've seen a few top already so we should get a few bites."

Despite Scott's confidence, I've got to say I wasn't so sure. The rain was coming down in bucketloads, and as I made my way around the lake for a look there was rainwater making its way down the path from all directions. Situated at the bottom of a hill, it was getting a dowsing and the water level was noticeably rising – the sort of conditions that kill so many venues.

Being quite a small water, it didn't take me long to get a feel for the place. I saw a fish poke its head out behind the same island that Scott had seen one, so I was instantly attracted to The Gate Swim which was to Scott's right. It had lots of open water and scope to spread the rods about. Lady Luck was obviously on my side, because as soon as I'd finished my full circuit, the rain eased off, allowing me to set up without getting too soaked to the bone. The water level was almost touching the lip of the boarding in front of the swim so the margins looked an obvious attraction. The fish just had to come in close to browse areas they wouldn't



All set up in Gate Swim.

A real cracker caught from Bentley in the summer months of 2009.



Some of the mirrors are lovely and scaly.



otherwise have been able to get to. As I stood there on the end of the swim looking out, as if by magic, a carp rolled right in front of the margin to my left! Talk about being confident, I was brimming with the stuff!

### First Night Tactics

The first rod went slap bang right where the carp had just rolled, a single Solar Top Banana pop-up offered an inch off the deck. There was no free bait put around it because I didn't want to spook the carp that was obviously there. I literally walked to the edge of the board and dropped the rig into place inch-perfect, slack lining the line in place to keep things nice and covert. The right-hand rod went to the right of the swim on a nice thick set of reeds, where depths of 5ft were to be found. November carp love a bit of cover so it looked the obvious spot, plus the water level at the back of the reeds was well up and it looked likely to attract the odd browser coming in to pick off any available food the rain had brought with it. I went with a Jacko Pop on this rod, again an inch off the bottom, this time sprinkling a couple of handfuls of 365 BYT pellets around the area. As for the middle rod, this went between the islands where I'd seen a carp top earlier, and just to be different I went with a Club Mix bottom bait on this rod with two baits crumbed close by, which had been dropped out with the bait boat.

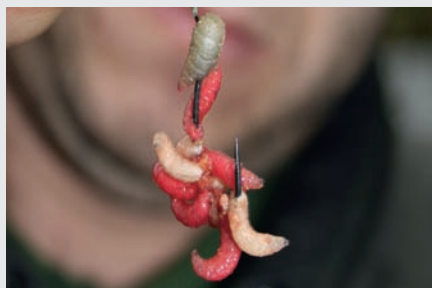
I peered out from the bivy and hoped it wasn't a run, but within seconds the bobbin was on the floor and I was frantically searching for my shoes and headtorch

The rain didn't hold off for long, and within an hour of me getting set up it was hammering it down again. I'd never seen such heavy rain in November before, it was more like April or May, it was so persistent. Within no time there was a river of water coming down the bank towards my bivy and, had it continued, we would probably have been flooded out. The ground was so sodden around us that we were slipping and sliding all over. It carried on right into dark until it eventually eased off. Both Scott and I could do nothing other than wait in the bivy and sit it out.

At 7.30 p.m. a single bleep on my middle rod signalled a drop-back. I peered out from the bivy and hoped it wasn't a run, but within seconds the bobbin was on the floor and I was frantically searching for my shoes and headtorch. As soon as I lifted the rod there was nothing there, not even the flick of a tail, which left me scratching my head as I redid the rig and put it back where I'd just retrieved it.

The night was a wet one, with the rain continuing on and off throughout. I heard a couple of fish really close in early in the

### CROWY'S TACTICS



We tried everything, including maggots, pellets, boilies and singles.

morning, the second one raising me from my bed for a look. It was literally right next to the edge of the board where my rods were, and although I didn't see it, it sounded a nice size. According to the owner, John, the nights tend to fish better than the days, so I was a bit surprised to have blanked when the fish had remained active. It had been the same for Scott, and he'd also had them crashing very close into his bank.

### The Big Show

I left my rods in place until 10.00 a.m., when, right out of the blue, three carp topped in different spots in front of me. The first one had been less than a yard off the edge of my swim again, making me jump out of my skin because at the time I was standing right next to it. It was so close to me, it landed on one of my lines where it re-entered the water, making the buzzer sound a few bleeps. Another fish topped in front of the closest Paddock Swim so I dropped a bait right on it, and the third fish popped its head out in open water so I dropped one on that, too.

The rest of the day saw me using similar tactics, as fish showed regularly out in front of me. It got silly in the end, and I decided to just leave the rods in place and let them do their work. Chasing the fish had produced nothing for either Scott or me, and between us that day we ended up trying maggots, pellets, corn, pop-ups, broken baits, and artificial baits, as well as combinations of them all. We even went on to Zigs for a short while as well as surface baits, but we just couldn't get a bite.

Come evening, the wind arrived, which made conditions more favourable. Unfortunately the rain continued, and it proved to be quite a hairy night with strong

winds gusting throughout. I had another couple of drop-back occurrences early on, which in the end I put down to a line trailer, but other than that, both our indicators remained motionless until I had to pack up at 5.00 a.m. to get back up north in order to miss the rush hour traffic.

Scott stayed on until 10.00 a.m., but like me, he had to conclude that the carp had well and truly beaten us on this particular trip. Of course there is an element of truth in that, but experience also told us that the weather during the 36 hours we were fishing played a huge part in the end result too. I would have dearly loved to have made it down for another try at Bentley before this feature went to press because I know it would have been a different outcome, but with Christmas deadlines and appointments ahead of me, sadly, there was no way I could fit it in. Who knows, maybe I'll return for another crack in the New Year when conditions might be much more favourable. It's certainly the kind of venue that I warm to, and somewhere I'd enjoy spending a bit of time with the right gang of mates.

### Overall Opinion

Despite the weather conditions making it tough going, I really warmed to Bentley. Perhaps this is because I'm a fan of small waters, but I also think it was because of the quality of the fishery. The place



Being a small water, the carp aren't shy about giving themselves away.

was immaculate, like someone's back garden pond. The swims were well spaced out and bedded with bark to make them look neat, and the location of the lake in peaceful surroundings made it feel wonderful. For the short time Scott and I were there, it was our water and we could spread the rods about without upsetting anyone, basically just doing our own thing and making as much noise or being as quiet as we chose to be. It was great, apart from the fish, which drove us bonkers, crashing and showing everywhere, not playing ball. I'm not making excuses, but I reckon we'd have slayed them if there hadn't been so much rain coming into the lake. It was gushing in, and from past experiences, that much water always kills lakes like this stone dead. Another time, another try, I know it would have been a different result, and that's why I feel safe in recommending this fishery even though I haven't caught from there. It's somewhere perfect for small groups of anglers who want to hire a lake for their own use, or if you want to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. A quality venue, and one I'd rate as 7 out of 10. **SG**

I left my rods in place until 10.00 a.m., when, right out of the blue, three carp topped in different spots in front of me



There are some nice commons in there too, this one being ounces short of 20lb.

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