

## An introduction to Loch Style Boat fishing - Part two

So, having read the first part of this article, you are perhaps beginning to see some benefits, not least that you are comfortable, dry for the most part and, once you get the hang of things, you should be regularly out-fishing the bank-based and float tube brigade hands down.

### Boat

First you need a boat, preferably one which will hold two anglers side by side. In Great Britain almost all sizeable stillwater fisheries have a fleet of fibreglass or clinker built boats with motors all ready for hire. Not so in South Africa where we don't have that size of fishery or that market either, so most anglers come up with their own solutions. Certainly if you have a cottage on a sizeable piece of trout water then you can invest in a 'proper' boat and leave it on the shoreline. For the rest of us, mobility and ease of launch mean that the 'standard' outfit is an inflatable boat, usually a version of the fishduc layout.

This is a multi-sectioned inflatable with a transom at the back (see the ARK website at [www.arkinflatables.co.za](http://www.arkinflatables.co.za)). The transom allows the fitting of a motor if you wish, although personally for anything other than massive waters, I fail to see the point. The trouble and expense of carting about heavy batteries and motors isn't worth it when the oars suffice more than adequately.

### Drogue

Secondly you need a drogue. That is an underwater parachute to slow the boat's progress ahead of the wind and to stabilise it to some degree. There are lots of different designs, most of a general square parachute shape with a hole in the centre, although many anglers are now opting for a more blanket-shaped drogue. A variety of sizes can also be carried to allow adjustment for different wind conditions. You cannot effectively fish this style without a drogue, it is as simple as that.

### Partner

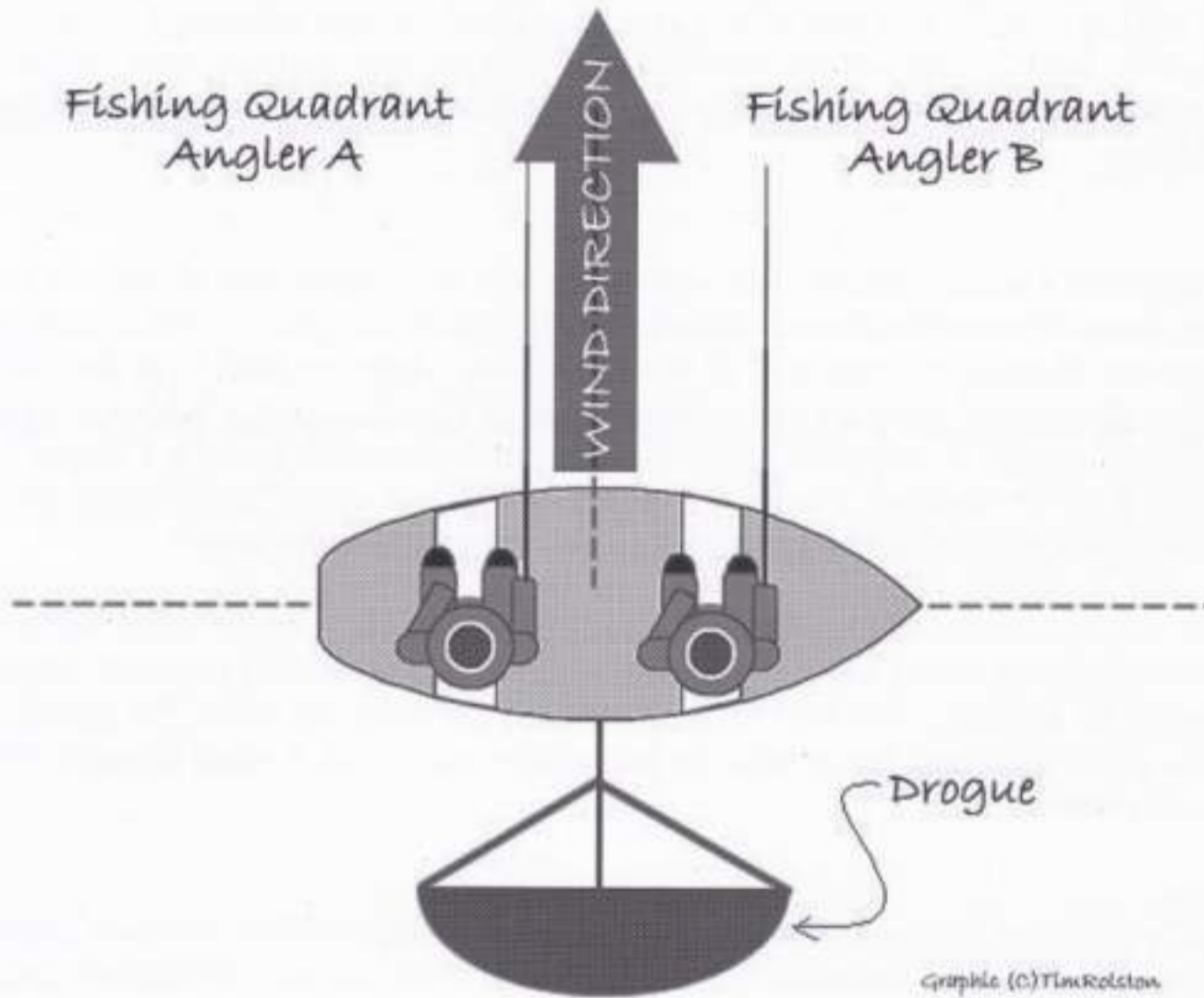
Thirdly, you need a partner - fishing on your own can be done but it is more effective to have two of you working at the problem of fishing different flies, different lines etc. until you find the fish. Also it is a lot less hassle in launching the boat and deploying the drogue with two of you.

### Tackle

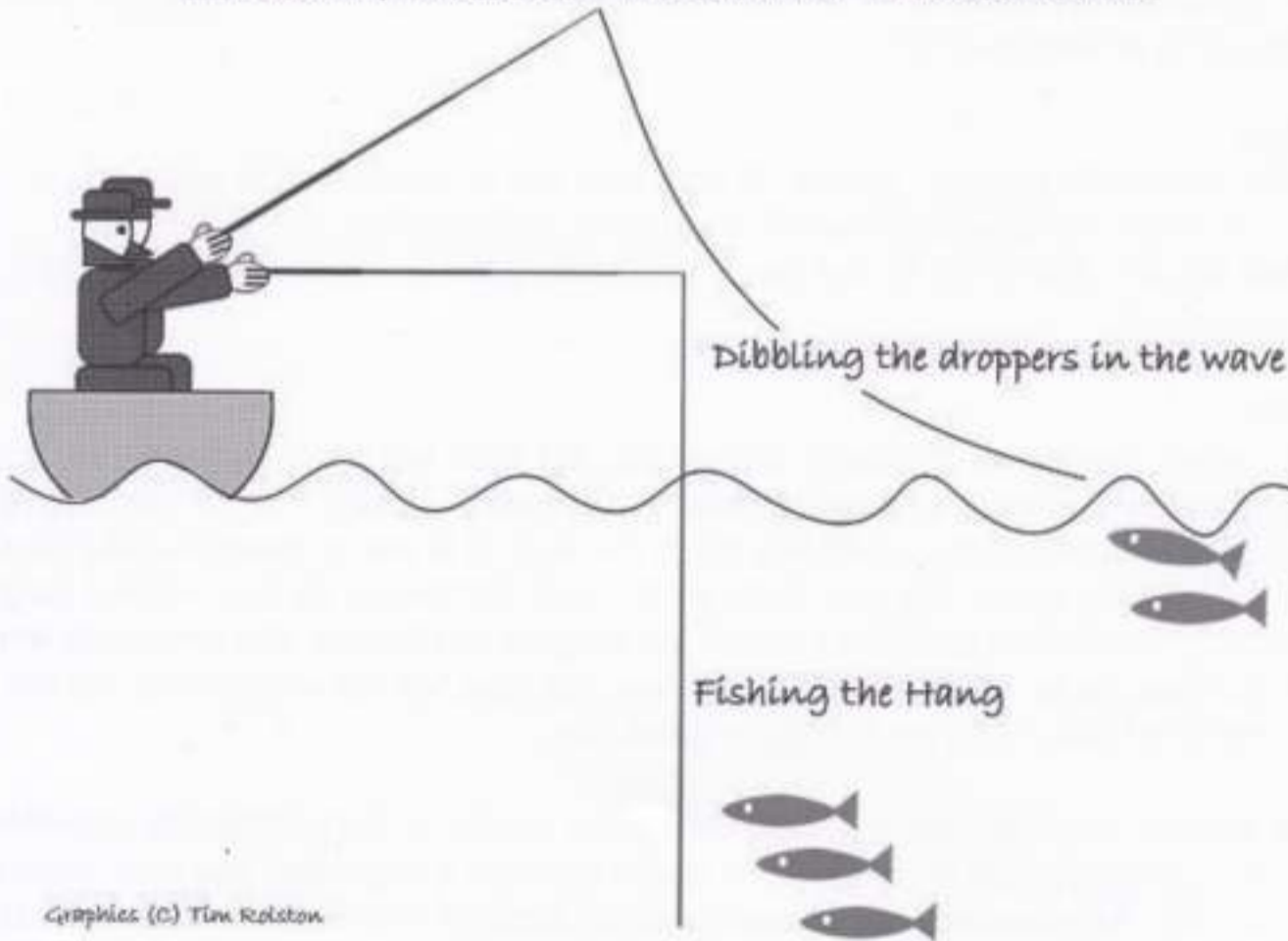
Tackle setups need to be efficiently changeable, and none too light, a ten foot six weight rod is probably the norm among the current aficionados locally. The all time favourite being the Stealth Magnum, a giant of a rod in this field. It is sturdy enough to take the odd bit of punishment and it will cast thirty metre casts downwind all day without fatigue. Flimsy little thin-walled toothpicks are not the thing for this fishing. The conditions can be harsh and you can be hauling fast-sinking lines, hooking big fish and bashing the rod tip with bead head flies, so err on the side of durability.

Reels are less important but a system with spare spools or interchangeable cassettes is essential. It is not unusual to change lines several times on a single drift and even dozens of times in a day. As a boat angler, your control of the depth of your flies is crucial and finding

### BASIC SET UP FOR DRIFT BOAT FISHING



### INDUCING TAKES AT THE END OF THE RETRIEVE



the right depth on any given day takes experimentation. An angler fishing at the correct depth can hammer his boat partner, who is only a metre away, into complete submission. I have personally seen differences of 10 to 15 fish between anglers in the same boat. Sometimes I was the winner and sometimes not, but almost always it was the depth that was the problem and not the fly. So spare cassettes or spools and a selection of lines are a must. For a drift boat angler the range of lines is the most important variable in one's arsenal. Having a variety and being able to change them quickly is a big part of the game. It currently takes me one minute fifteen seconds to change lines from flies out of the water to fishing again.

### Lines

Ideally you should carry lines all from the same manufacturer, of the same type and of various sink rates. I carry a floater, slow intermediate, fast intermediate, DI3, DI5 and DI7 and change them frequently if I am not finding the fish. It is not a good idea to have different line types so that some are shooting heads and others weight forwards, you will never know if you are fishing deeper or shallower when you switch lines.

### Flies

I am frequently of the opinion that 'it is not about the fly' but at the same time only an idiot would venture forth without a good selection. Personally, I like to have at least one imitative pattern, one lure or bright attractor fly and one traditional style fly on the leader at the same time unless I have something specific to target. But flies are not a concern as you do not have to physically carry them, and in a boat, you can comfortably accommodate hundreds in a large competition box. Very nice wooden boat boxes are now available from Charles Thomas at Thomas Restorations e mail: [t.rests@absamail.co.za](mailto:t.rests@absamail.co.za).

### Leaders

These need not be complicated but they should be long and level. There is no need for tapers on leaders you are casting downwind all the time - a great advantage of boat fishing is that, except in flat calm conditions, you are always fishing with the wind at your back. All good boat anglers will fish three flies most of the time. This requires two droppers and a point fly spaced as far apart as you can get them, about a metre and a half if you are fishing a ten foot rod. Remember that the point of boat fishing is to cover water and the further the flies are apart, the more water you are covering. This applies to your casting too, so don't imagine that because you are in a boat you don't need to be able to cast. Sure, you can catch fish on short casts, but the angler who covers the most water wins much of the time and long casts from a sitting position are something that takes a bit of practice.

### Net

You will require at least one net on the boat, preferably one with a long handle and a big catch and release mesh bag. With long rods, long leaders of up to twenty feet and strong fish you won't land many without that net.

First, as with all fishing, you need to have a close look at what is going on. Obviously, if there are a lot of fish rising you know where to fish and at what depth, but that is a rarity. Aim to drift downwind preferably over a variety of depths of water and different structures. Winds can be highly variable but, to start with, go for a long steady drift. Cover water and change lines, don't worry too much about the flies. Have your boat partner fish a different line and a different set of flies until you find some action.

If you are fishing a sinking line 'count down' your casts, that is count how long you let things sink before you start retrieving. That way, if you hit fish you will know what depth to count to next time. Bear in mind this is very individualistic, your count may not be the same as your partner's if he/she is casting shorter or with a different line.

Keep drifting and searching for fish, if you find a hot spot and that means a few fish in a few casts or you and your partner go solid at the same time, you have found a shoal. When things go quiet again, row the boat back and start the same drift, coming back over the same water if possible. Frequently, once you have located a shoal, you can make numerous passes over it and take fish on each drift.

Constantly watch out for changes. The fish can switch depths at different times of the day or switch food forms if there is a hatch or an ant fall for example. Don't forget that you need to deduct the boat speed from your retrieve speed to know how fast the flies are fishing. You generally don't need to rip them through the water but you don't want slack or you will miss takes. A slow retrieve to maintain contact with the fly is the minimum, even when waiting for the line to sink.

### **Differences to bank fishing and float tubing**

The main difference to get used to is managing the line depth. From the bank I tend to control depth with the weight of the fly. Because you are not moving, you can wait for the flies to reach the required depth. In a tube you are pulling the line all the time as you are moving backwards. Neither of these is true in a boat and the sink rate of the line will change depending on your speed. In a flat calm, the lines sink slower, at a moderate drift pace, a bit quicker as you feed slack into the system. In a good blow you are pulling so fast that the flies don't have too much time to sink before you have to recast. It takes a mind shift to get used to these variations.

### **Etiquette**

In competitions these things are, to a degree, laid down in the rules. Social fishing is not quite the same, but etiquette decrees you should only fish your 'half' of the water, that is the 90 ° quadrant drawn from a centre line perpendicular through the middle of the boat and another, running at right angles to it, from bow to stern. You shouldn't fish behind you or in your boat partner's water, at least without asking. You should also avoid casting at the same time as your boat partner. Simultaneous casts are possible, but it is a recipe for tangles or hooks in the ear, not to mention frustration, so monitor his/her casting and time yours accordingly. Keep your rod tip low unless casting, holding it up is again a recipe for frustration and tangles.

### **Techniques**

Other than varying lines and flies, you should vary retrieves from dead slow to as fast as you can go. You should also 'dibble' the flies on the surface as they get close to the boat and this will frequently elicit a response. Also 'hanging' the flies, holding the rod horizontal to the water with the flies about ten feet down for anything up to a minute just before lifting off to cast will frequently get results that a standard retrieve doesn't. Play around, mix things up and, most of all, cover water, if you don't catch a lot of fish doing all of this you can rest assured that nobody else will be catching much either and it is just a slow day.