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NORWEGIAN PIKING... ISN'T IT GOOD?

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HIGHLAND PERCH TREK



Issue 146 January 2010 £2.85



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THE EDITOR HAS FISHED FOR PIKE IN NORWAY, BUT DIDN'T PULL UP ANY TREES. ARNOUW TERLOUW SHOWS HOW IT SHOULD BE DONE.



Our holiday home perched high up the rocks

NORWEGIAN PIKING... ISN'T IT GOOD?

Main pic: Finally, I hit the jackpot, landing this aggressive pike of 113cm after a memorable fight

Sweden might be regarded as a prime pike destination (take for instance Västervik), but it is not so well known that Norway offers maybe even better fishing for big pike. This, I can assure you, will

change in the next few years! Last year, at the beginning of May, I was invited by the Norwegian hunting and fishing company Din Tur to explore the vast waters of Stora Lee in the South of Norway, on the border with Sweden.

Stora Lee is a very big (80 km long!) and very deep lake (100 metres deep in places) where in the clear water there are salmon (landlocked), brown trout, houting, burbot, big perch and extremely hard fighting pike.

Our 'home' for that week was Stora Lee Camping near

Halden/Aremark, ideally located opposite the connecting passage to Foxen, another big deep lake with dangerous submerged rocks situated in the province of Dalsland in Sweden. More than enough options when you think that Stora Lee alone has numerous interesting bays and islands!

The previous week the weather had been exceptionally warm for the time of year and according to some other anglers who had fished Foxen, the fishing had proved to be quite difficult. The pike had just started/finished spawning and in some sheltered bays in Foxen the water temperature had

risen to 17°C. The weather was still bright and sunny on arrival, but the forecast told us that the weather would change in the coming days with lower temperatures and even frost at nights. To cut a long story short, after three days hard fishing we were quite desperate. Because of the sudden strong, cold

northerly wind and frosty nights, the water temperature on Stora Lee had dropped from 11-13° to 5-6°C in only 12 hours! On Foxen the temperature drop was less extreme, but it had dropped a couple of degrees. This sudden drop seemed to have stopped the activity of the pike and

whatever we tried those three days, fishing deeper to around 8-10 metres near submerged rocks and very shallow in sheltered bays, was useless. Where the water was considerably warmer we saw hardly any activity of white fish. Nothing seemed to help. Not even a sign of schools of bream,



Two of my favourite lures, which did very well on this trip

which had been a pain for Michel the previous week (hooking them constantly in their backs with lures). What could more could we do?

CALL THE GUIDE

A phone call to the domestic fishing guide Pal Dramstad didn't give us much more hope, although he gave us the advice to fish with dark coloured jerkbaits (brown, orange, dark

green) on places where the bottom shelves up from 7-10 metres to 2-3 metres,

something we had tried numerous times the previous days without any luck. However, he had caught a lot of fish doing that same thing two days ago, with a few pike over one metre, in a bay which we had ignored so far... one of the few! We decided to give this bay our last shot the next day – you never know!

After the alarm had woken us at five o'clock in the morning, we were on our way. Luckily, the water was calm that morning and 45 minutes later we arrived at the back of the bay where we found some interesting rock points with nice depths around them. But it was the same story again; whatever we tried, we caught hardly any pike, let alone a big one! It was already past midday and we were drifting alongside two islands when a big pike suddenly appeared out of the dark depths, aggressively following

my Sizmik Magnum Toad. This pike looked definitely hungry so I quickly dropped the lure again and within seconds it was attacked again violently. With the attack only a few metre under the boat the rod was bent double on the strike. Minutes later we could admire the first big pike of the week; 113cm and in fine condition.

We fished the same spot for another 20 minutes during which I got another hit on my Mega-Frog, but after that nothing more. In the shallower water in between the islands where there was some weed growth, Dirk's first cast with a Strike Pro Buster Jerk resulted straightaway in a nice pike of around 15lb. In the next hour we experienced some hectic action, hooking at least 15 pike, mostly on jerkbaits. Okay, no metre-plus fish, but nice distinctively marked pike between 75 and 90cm, which

all fought incredibly hard!

Another isolated island looked quite interesting with sharp submerged rocks coming up steep from 10-15 metres of water. On the first point I soon caught a nice pike of around 80cm on a natural perch coloured Fox Replicant. That gave hope for more. Ten minutes later the same lure landed with a big splash right in between two submerged rocks. The moment I started cranking it up of the bottom with a sharp jerk, I got a violent take. For a frightening moment I could feel the braid scraping over the rocks but seconds later the fish dived deep under the boat. I could feel it was a big fish, but how big? Minutes later I saw a dark shape in the clear water and my first estimation is another pike of around or just



Any idea how many casts you make during a week like this?

over a metre. But when I dragged the fish beside the boat we both realised it was much bigger. On the unhooking mat in

the boat the tape-measure revealed 118cm! A beautiful marked Norwegian pike in splendid condition at around 25-27lb. What a day... and it was not over yet!

CANNIBAL HECHTER

Towards 18:00 hours we were back at the two small islands, but funnily enough we failed to get a bite in the first half hour. Had they moved again to another place? On the echo sounder we noticed a long submerged rocky ledge on the other side of the smallest island, going out for at least 50 meters before it dropped sharply from two to eight metres. Every drift, right on that precise spot we hooked one pike after the other on our jerkbaits, and only one fish was under 90cm – this was complete madness! Dirk landed at least 10 pike including fish of 97, 97, 98 and 99cm, but failed somehow to catch one over the magic 100cm. Luck was on my side this day and after catching a couple of nice pike over 90cm, I had another big, mean but lean pike of 111cm, followed by an even bigger fish, which had recently swallowed another pike of at least 60cm! Just when I wanted to take a closer picture of that, while Dirk was unhooking the pike, the fish made a sudden move and Dirk had to let it go. No picture of this cannibalistic

pike (except for a head shot in the water), no exact measurement, but we both agreed that this pike was a lot bigger than the last one! Four fish over 110cm on lures in one day – I have experienced worse days!

Euphoric we drove home towards our comfortable holiday house. Who would have thought this after the previous, very tough days? Not us, for sure!

Not surprisingly, we were back at the same place again early morning the next day, but after four hook-ups in a row, it was suddenly all over on the hotspot. We fished all areas around the two islands, but to no avail, except for one nice pike of 97cm which very greedily attacked my Salmo Pike jerkbait, as if there was no tomorrow in barely two metres of water.

The rest of the day we managed to catch a few more pike, but nothing to compare to the hectic moments of action of the previous day. Still, Dirk was luckier this time with a fish of exactly 100cm.

JACKPOT

The last day came quicker than expected and we decided to explore another area which looked very interesting on the map with loads of small and bigger islands and shallow bays close to deeper water. Although



My fifth pike of the trip over a metre – a heavy lady of 102cm



The second big pike of the day and what a fish – a 118cm Norwegian beauty

Dirk caught both his metre-plus fish on a dark green, perch coloured Max (home-made by André Koehoorn and Marco Dol), and of my five big pike, three were caught on a good-old brown/golden Robbait (by Rob Kraaijenveld), one on a brown/orange bellied Sizmik Magnum Toad, and the biggest on a natural perch coloured 20cm Fox Replicant.

Seldom have I fished in a more beautiful, pristine surrounding as here in southern Norway with loads of fish eagles, gorgeous black-throated divers, beavers and elk. One thing is for sure: in the deep, clear water of Stora Lee (and Foxen) live enormous pike. It would not surprise me at all if in the coming years a monster pike of well over 20kg is caught. The unofficial record for Stora Lee at the time of writing is already an impressive 17.9kg and 132cm!

NORTH & SOUTH

This spring, Dirk and I were back in Norway to explore Kroderen, a 'virgin' lake north of Oslo. Again very deep (133 metres!) and quite big, although not huge by Norwegian standards with its 40km length. We arrived the last week of May, and the hill tops were still covered in snow! The spring had been much colder than last year and we hoped that the pike hadn't been spawning yet. Our host Ole-Jakub informed us, however, that our timing was not ideal; the previous week had been quite warm and

we caught some nice pike during the morning and beginning of the afternoon, nothing special happened except maybe for two big fish which followed my lure to right under the boat, but were not willing to attack it whatever I tried.

However, as we drifted along a series of small bays in a big island, just as it started raining, we hit the jackpot again on our jerkbaits. Most of them were good fish to well over 90cm again, and as Dirk was playing a smaller fish I caught my fifth pike over a metre, a very thick fish of 102cm (close to 20lb). We missed a lot of strikes on our 'flankers' (flat jerkbaits), while every strike on my Salmo Pike resulted in a fish. They seemed to be very aggressive towards members of the same species!

Dirk had saved his luck for the last moment and finally

hooked another big fish which grabbed his dark green perch Max right under the boat. It seemed that this fish wanted to prove one more time how strong these Norwegian pike are and dived into the reeds time after time before we could land it. A gorgeous looking pike of 111cm, which looked even bigger with its big, aggressive head.

Three very difficult days, followed by three fantastic days with over 50 pike, most of them well over 80cm, which gave a whole other impression of the fishing on Stora Lee and Foxen!

There was one other striking fact; all pike over a metre (and also all the really big fish that followed our lures) were caught on lures without a rattle! Coincidence? Maybe. True, we caught a lot of fish on the Strike Pro Buster jerkbaits, but none was over a metre.

Fish eagle sightings are common



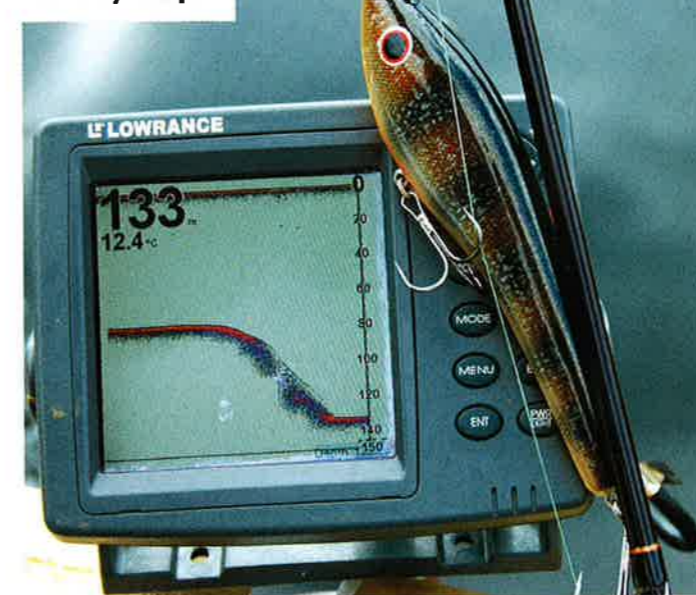
he thought that the pike had just started or just had finished spawning. The water temperature showed 12.5°C... we would see.

After we made some adjustments to the boat to fix our electric trolling motor we headed down south the first afternoon, which only took us 20 minutes with the brand new 50hp four-stroke engine of the owner! On the map this part of the lake looked quite promising with numerous shallow bays, but after three hours fishing there was no sign of pike except for two small ones. We could see the bottom in 10ft in the gin-clear water, but it looked absolutely dead in most of the interesting places.



Brutal attack on the brown coloured Fox Euro Replicant – looks like a brown trout?

The Norwegian mountain lakes are very deep!



The next day we had an early start to explore the much deeper north part of the lake. Not the best pike conditions with hardly any wind and bright sunshine, but at least that gave us the opportunity to have a good look at some places Ole-Jakub had showed us on the map. Before arriving there we decided to take a closer look at another bay which also looked very interesting on the map. The echo sounder soon revealed a big, long midwater

plateau of around 8-10ft deep with a sharp drop-off to 10-30 metres – very interesting. The edge of the sharp drop-off also had some early weed growth. Soon we hooked our first pike with our jerkbaits, all of them just on the edge of deeper water. Nice pike between 75-90cm, but clearly just finishing spawning; they were all quite lean and not in the best condition with distinctive bite marks. If you hooked one, you could expect to hook more in a

defined place.

After two hours and some more average pike, we had a pretty good view of this place and moved further north. We found another very big midwater plateau with only two or three metres of water on top and the same pattern was seen; if we hooked up with one pike, some others would soon follow from the same place, then a long stretch of nothing before hitting a group of pike again. Clearly something to do with spawning. Had they moved out of the shallow bays after spawning to gather on these huge midwater plateaus, or had they been spawning here? If the latter was the case, where were the big mamas?

After a short break we headed even further north, to the entrance of the river. We expected it to be quite shallow there but suddenly the depth dropped from 10ft to 25-30ft and the echo sounder showed a lot of bait fish at around 20ft – something we hadn't seen yet. On his first cast with a brown 8in. Fox Euro Replicant Dirk straight away hooked a good pike in a slightly better condition; 107cm and around 20lb. A promising start and we expected a lot more in this

area. To our surprise, though, there was still no sign of any other pike an hour later, although the whole area was full of bait fish according to the echo sounder.

SOFTBAIT ATTACK

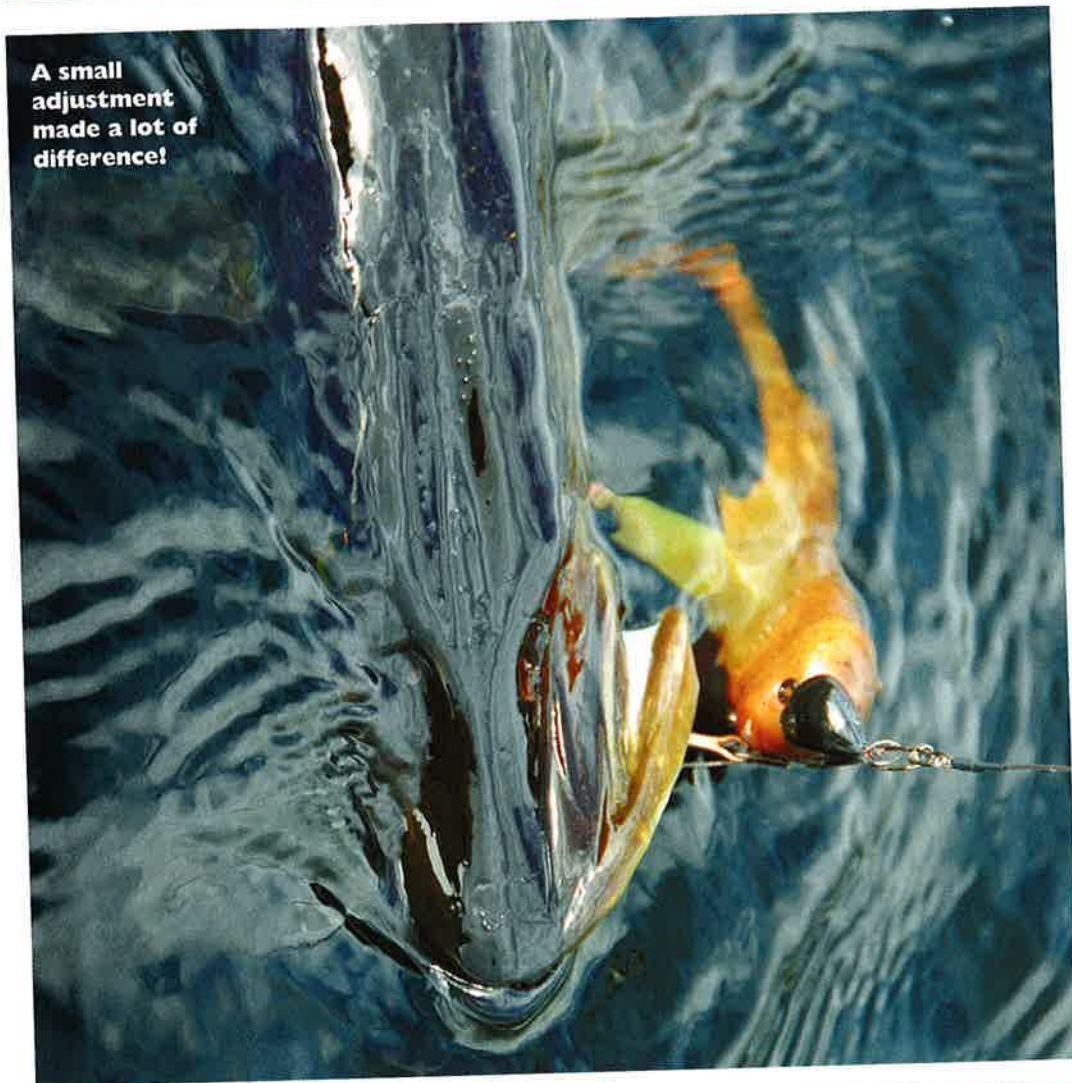
The next two days we visited the same plateaus and explored some other bays and rocky parts. Although we managed to catch quite a number of nice pike on jerkbaits, we also missed quite a lot of strikes. It seemed that the pike were not too aggressive, not too active and not too hungry, which was not a real surprise with the beautiful sunny weather. We hoped things would improve with a sudden change in the weather with a lot of wind coming from the North and lower temperatures.

Our hopes were high the next day again with seemingly ideal conditions to drift along the edges, but the fishing proved to be even more difficult until we switched to softbaits: 6in. firetiger Fox Replicants, chartreuse coloured shads and of course my good old Sizmik Giant Toads! At least they were hitting those lures, but still very finicky, only biting the head or grabbing the head,



Dirk with a well earned big Kroderen pike

A small adjustment made a lot of difference!



Kroderen are very big, deep lakes, where you have to search for the best spots according to the time of year. In the spring (May-June) you can find them in shallow bays, near islands and also plateaux surrounded by deep water. In the summer (July-August) the pike move to deeper, open and cooler water where you catch most of the big pike over 30-50 metres water, sometimes just two metres beneath the surface! They will be close to big schools of houting and smelt – find them and you will find the pike! Trolling with planer boards over open water can be very effective in that time of year. In the autumn (September-November) the pike return again to the shallower spots, but still close to deep water.

Maybe it is wise to hire a local guide such as Pal Dramstad (you can book him via Din Tur) for a day or two, so you get a little familiar with the kind of fishing and good spots. He also knows some smaller lakes, especially for fly-fishing for pike or can take you salmon or trout fishing (trolling) for a day.

tail or legs... which was sometimes quite frustrating! Things got better only when I made a small adjustment to my giant frog, placing an extra treble right at the front. I landed some nice pike, but no giants, although I hooked a good kamikaze fish of well over 20 lb which tried to grab my frog when it was already out of the water! Dirk had a little more luck and landed the biggest of the trip, a very nice but lean pike of 116cm (around 22-24lb).

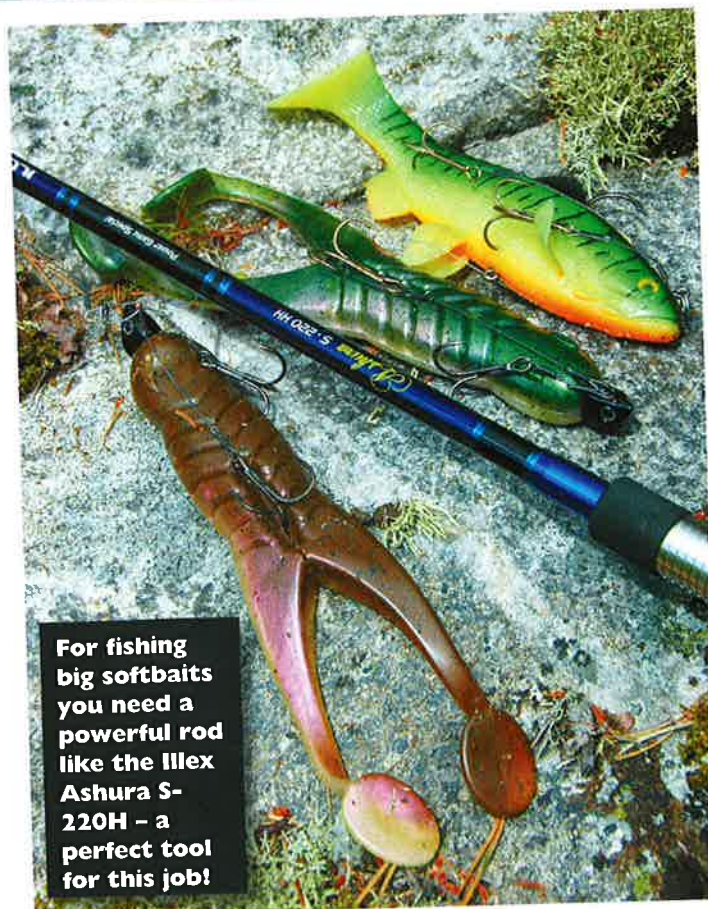
Sadly, the last day fishing was almost impossible on the plateaux due to strong winds, but with over 80 pike (and a same number missed or lost) in 4½ days of fishing that was not too bad. I am sure that if our timing could have been a little better, we would have had a fantastic week with more bigger fish. We'll have to come back another day, maybe in the autumn when the pike are in prime condition...

THE LOWDOWN

Stora Lee and Kroderen are two of Din Tur's numerous 'new' freshwater pike destinations in Norway (visit www.dintur.no). Stora Lee camping is about halfway between Goteborg and Oslo in the South of Norway. You can fly to Oslo then drive for 2-2½ hours to Stora Lee, or drive all the way. Noresund/Kroderen is even closer to Stockholm, in the mountains just 110 km to the north.

You don't need a permit for fishing in Norway, but beware; for fishing in Sweden (i.e. Foxen) you do! Something else you also have to take care of are the dangerous submerged rocks which can ruin your boat and engine in a split second! Most of them are well signed on the maps and marked with a stick (on Stora Lee and Foxen at least), but you have to stay alert at all times!

Stora Lee, Foxen and



For fishing big softbaits you need a powerful rod like the Illex Ashura S-220H – a perfect tool for this job!