

Didier playing a fly caught pike.

By Liam Kane

THE first pike that was caught on a fly lure in Ireland that I am aware of was in 1878 on the 23rd February on Lough Erne and weighed 30 lbs. That particular lure was cast and recorded as a pike fly, but unfortunately the angler's name is not known or recorded in that wonderful *Domesday Book of Mammoth Pike* by Fred Buller. Fred did list five other mammoth pike that were caught in the Lough Erne system, starting with a truly mammoth leviathan weighing a massive 65 lbs that measured 55 ins in length and was caught by Fred Johnston while trolling during the month of April in the year 1880. It is listed in *The Field* on the 14th June 1890 on page 881 with the head of the pike being preserved.

Another mammoth pike, weighing 43 lbs with a length of 48 ins and a 26 ins girth, was also recorded by Buller and was lifted out of the Erne system in March 1926 by a Mrs McManus and is listed in the *Fishing Gazette* on 12th June 1926 with the pike being cased. A fine 40 lbs pike was caught by J. H. Thompson while live baiting (not allowed



Didier's big Erne pike.

now) on Lough Erne in 1922 and is listed in *Where to Fish* (1926) on page 35. Another Lough Erne mammoth pike just 2 ozs short of 40 lbs which measured 48 ins in length was caught in a net and is recorded in the *Anglers Mail* on 27th March 1974. Two other mammoth pike, both weighing 38 lbs, were also caught from the Lough Erne system; the first was listed by P.J. Martin in *Days Among the Pike and Perch* (1907) and the big pike was cased as a trophy fish. The other 38 lbs pounder was caught by Sammy Shaw and was discussed in a conversa-

tion by Fred Buller with D. Barnes in 1976 and this big pike was also cased.

I remember reading about all these Lough Erne mammoth pike which all came back to me when I received an invitation to go piking on the Erne system on two private lakes in the Castle Hamilton estate in Killeshanda, Co. Cavan. If the weather conditions were right, I hoped to cast a fly lure on some of the small lakes close to the Castle Hamilton estate particularly on the Erne system that has at least 25 other lakes in and around the village of Killeshanda and another 375

lakes just waiting to be explored from the shore, boat and particularly from float tubes for anglers who like to cast a fly in the company of other float tube companions as it is important when fishing to have safety in numbers.

As I met up with my good friend Paul Bourke of Inland Fisheries Ireland, we made the two hour journey on a very mild, frost free November morning to Castle Hamilton to be met by Alan and Audrey Kells, owners of this magnificent 16th century estate, who kindly informed us that we would discuss the day's fishing plans over a



Clockwise, from left (top): Brian into a big one on the fly, (top right) Brian taking it easy, (bottom) Brian's fly-caught pike.

hearty breakfast along with the three other pike anglers who were also looking forward to a bite to eat before our start to the day's piking (before the Cavan pike got in on their own bite action). The plan had changed slightly and that was to fly fish on two small lakes with the permission of the local landowners; one lake that was quite shallow that morning and the other which was a lot deeper in the afternoon. Our guide that day was well known Castle Hamilton French angler Didier Martin who, I would discover later on during the day, could cast a fly onto an old florin coin (the coin with the salmon displayed) such was his expertise. Incidentally, the old 1943 florin in mint condition is worth a cool €32,000 if you are lucky enough to have one.

Meanwhile having met our angling guide Didier and well known pike anglers Brian Coughlan and Markus Muller

who intended to fly fish from their float tubes, we were soon on our way to that first lake that just looked real "pikey" with almost the whole shoreline surrounded by tall cream coloured reeds with just enough bank space left for Paul and 'your's truly' to cast a dead bait. The three float tube pike anglers had the rest of the lake where they could cast their multi-coloured snag free flies in search of some Killeshandra *Esox lucius*. The early morning sunshine cleared the morning mist off the lake and the lake's mallard ducks took flight as well. In a matter of minutes all three float tube anglers were

afloat and casting the wide gape 3/0 and 4/0 barbless hooks decorated with bright blue, green, orange

and silver coloured flies into the lake's margins where they hoped that any predator would take the imitation fly of minnow, jackpike or sprat that would be pulled through the last of the summer lilies pads that were just below the surface of the lake's gin clear water.

Indeed Didier had caught three pike to 10 lbs as Brian was fighting his best pike of six – a fine 12 pounder that was quickly returned after some action filled photographs.

Markus also returned another fine double to 10 lbs to bring the morning's total catch of 15 fly caught pike. In fact all the pike caught by the float tube anglers were taken in one and a half hours and were all returned which is just wonderful fishing by any standard – be it fly, lure or dead baits. Meanwhile having not wet a



Red Kite soaring.



Markus admiring his fly-caught pike. Below: More action!

float (just taking some photographs), Paul and I travelled with the crew to the second lake which was just a small cast away as the crow flies but not before a cup or two of our favourite 'golden moments' and a bite of a Castle Hamilton specially made sandwich set the pike crew up for the rest of the day. The float tube anglers got on with their fly casting with some casting a weighted eye fly which presents the hook upside down in a snag free position when retrieving. 'Your's truly' and Paul Bourke took to the water with Alan Kells on the oars as we set about casting some roach and pollan floated dead baits set at 8ft into the deeper water at the Northern end of the lake where a small stream fed into the lake's deep water. What is it they say about streams, rivers and tributaries that flow into these lakes? A lot of the time the big *Esox* sometimes just lie in the current where the bait fish i.e. roach, rudd, skimmers, jack pike and even some duckling are taken when the pike are on the feed.

The mild weather continued as Alan rowed the boat closer to the small stream, amid conversation about a near 30 lbs plus pike that Didier had caught just a few weeks earlier on a lure, but not on a fly which would have been a



feather in his cap for he has a passion for fly caught pike. Something that Didier intends to do in 2013 is to try and catch a 30 lbs specimen pike on a fly. I just hope that Didier does not catch a 30 lbs plus pike while float tube fishing on the Erne for, if he does, he might just end up on the River Shannon in Banagher which is a long drive back to the Erne. Our conversation was interrupted with a call from Paul who noticed that his float had submerged very quickly with some line being taken from his fixed spool reel. Paul set up his rod and struck into something quite

special that put a nice bend in his favourite pike rod. It was wonderful to see that the pike had taken Paul's pollan dead bait so quickly and was putting up a great fight before being safety netted by Alan. The fish measured 1 metre 3 cm and brought the needle of the certified scales to 18 lbs – a fine pike by any angler's standard. It was quickly photographed and returned as darkness started to fall.

The "Tube" anglers had added four more fly caught pike to their list that day with Paul's 18 pounder making a total of 20 pike caught on the Lough Erne system in four

hours.

We made our way back to the anglers' hub of Castle Hamilton to get ready for a traditional music night of fiddle, flute, bodhran and guitar playing agus Ceol agus Craic in the local hostelry and a few pints of the local brew at the end of a very enjoyable day afloat.

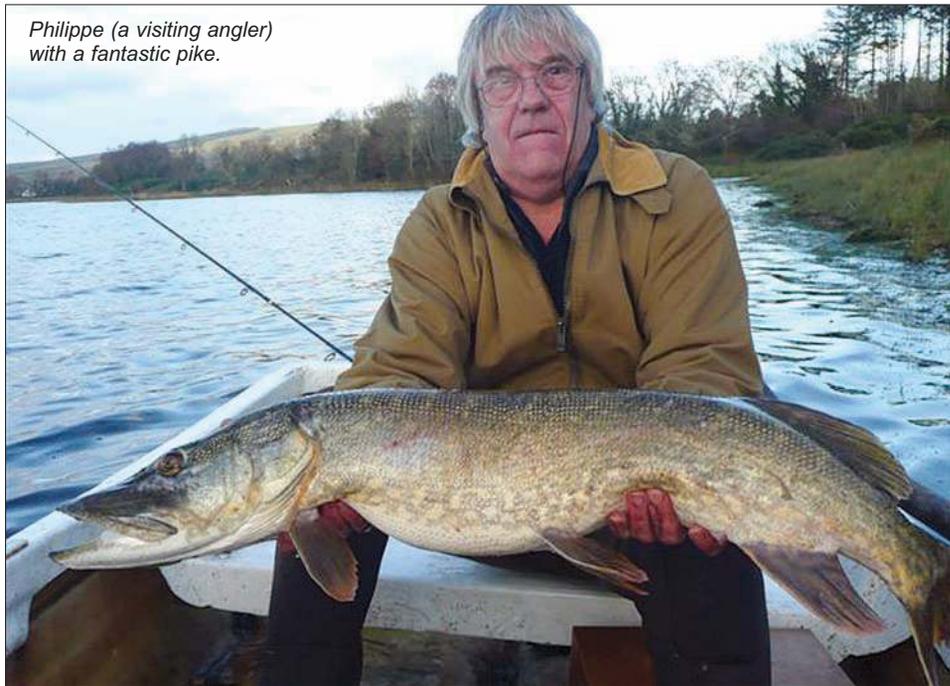
After an 8.00 am breakfast the next morning, the heavy overnight rain had cleared, and my head too. It was time for Paul and 'your's truly' to take a walk through the beautiful courtyard of the Castle Hamilton estate. We made our way to the forest with



Paul's big eighteen pounder.

camera at the ready in search of some red squirrels and red kites that have made the forest their home. More importantly, it gave us the opportunity to view the two Castle Hamilton lakes for our next trip to this angling paradise.

I must admit that I was never convinced or attracted to go fishing from a float tube. Possibly because I had never witnessed anglers fishing from these modern day tubes. However, having been in the company of three expert "float tubers" who practice all the safety precautions by mastering the techniques and who have learned to recognise the hazards before and, more importantly, when casting a lure/fly on the water, it is a wonderful way to enjoy your fishing in the great outdoors



Philippe (a visiting angler) with a fantastic pike.



Best fly-caught pike by Markus.

particularly in the company of other float anglers which

means safety in numbers. **Tight lines.**

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