

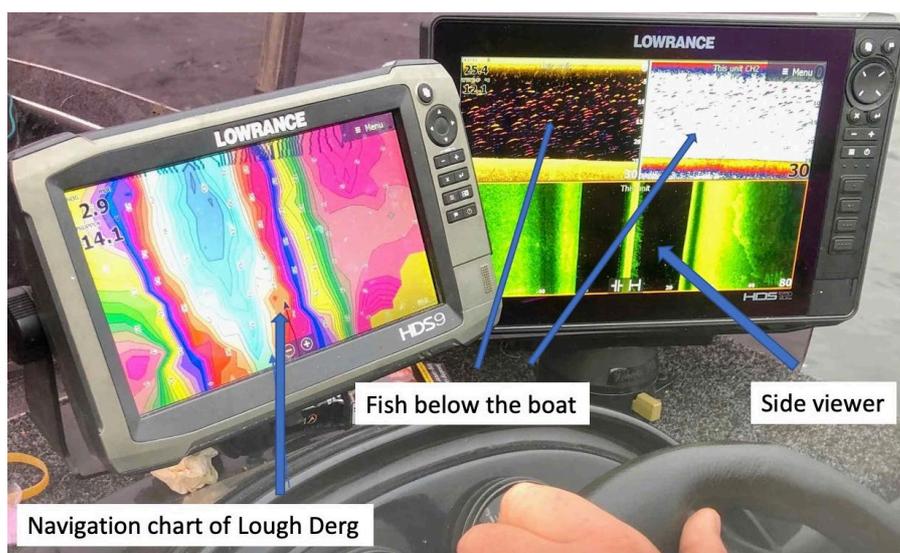
## Greetings from the Emerald Island, December 2021

My thoughts often turn to pike in early October once the trout season is over. I love flyfishing for pike, especially in spring and summer when they're actively hunting in shallow bays. But the weather is getting a bit cold by October, and big pike are solitary creatures and have left the shallows by then to hunt in deeper water. Live baiting isn't allowed, so the most effective methods are trolling with lures or deadbaits, and more static fishing with deadbaits when the weather turns very cold any time after mid-November.

My first few pike trips in October this year produced lots of fish, but mainly very small, and none over 4kg. By contrast, most of the biggest pike reported in the weekly Inland Fishing Ireland reports were coming from the huge loughs of the lower River Shannon system in the Republic of Ireland.

So, much as I love my local waters, I decided to try pastures new and headed south in mid-November to meet up with guide Damian Culliney at his base near Ennis in County Clare. We discussed what I wanted to do, and I assured Damian that I had no interest in smaller fish but wanted to focus purely on big pike. I'm over 70 and well into my bucket list, so my target was fish over 20lb, with the possibility of a 30lb+.

Our first focus was Lough Derg, bigger than two Sydney Harbours, the last big freshwater lake in the Shannon system, The day was mild for mid-November, around 14°C but feeling cooler with a slight wind chill. Damian's boat was ideal for the job, stable and comfortable with state-of-the-art electronics. We started trolling 40cm+ lures on four rods, working the underwater contours between five and ten metres. The lures were set to run between four and six metres down, two under paravanes to get the baits well out to the side of the boat. We could see plenty of bait fish on the echo sounder, mainly in the lower third of the water column, with a fair few bigger fish, probably pike, generally a bit below them.



Time passed quickly despite the absence of any bites, as the breeze got stronger and colder with occasional burst of rain. I reassured Damian at 3pm that I knew there could be blank days as big pike are few and far between, and don't feed every day. But one of the rods suddenly whacked over just after 4pm and I was attached to my new personal best Irish pike, spot on 20lb in old money.



We celebrated that evening over a glass or two of red Burgundy, and I said to Damian that the 20-pounder alone was enough to make my trip a success even if I didn't catch any more. He kindly offered to take me to another smaller lough where there was a good chance of more big pike the next day.

This lough was smaller than Lough Derg but just as wild and wonderful. We got there at 9am and started fishing the same way as the previous day, slowly trolling lures the size of a kilo trout at various depths until we found where the pike were feeding. It was milder and we were delighted to get a hit within the first hour from what turned out to be another Irish PB pike for me at 27lb 4oz.

A fantastic start, but the day got even better 40 minutes later when a beauty of 24lb 9oz took a different lure. That's the first time I've had two 'twenties' in one day, so I was already on cloud nine when a 'small' one about 17lb came to the same lure. She was lightly hooked so Damian easily released her beside the boat.

The light was fading fast after 3.30pm and I was happy to call it a day, but Damian insisted we stick it out till dark hoping for the trifecta. Not much chance, I thought, but some things are just meant to be, and the same rod that caught the 27-pounder pulled over hard and I was into another pike which looked relatively

small at first but somehow seemed to get bigger once she was in the boat. That one weighed just over 26lb to finish the best day's pike fishing I'll ever have.



*Three 20lb+ Pike, Nov 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021*

There were no more big pike for me on that trip, though one of about 4lb tried to eat a 40cm Savage line-thru trout and was nicely hooked in the scissors!

I've got another week booked with Damian in early January before heading to Launceston to meet Ian for six weeks at Miena. And I *must* get back to Lough Derg in April, as he tells me that the mayfly hatch starts much earlier than on Lough Erne, and there's a good chance of wild browns over 7lb.

So many fish...so little time...

Chris Paris  
Adelaide Fishing Club