

# CONQUER SNAKE LAKES

Canalised, snake-type lakes can be tricky to master. That's why we asked Jamie Hughes, one of the best anglers in the country at this style of fishing, to explain all.

## KNOW YOUR PEG

The most essential thing with snake lakes is where you fish at which time of year. In summer, clean, muddy banks that allow you to get as tight across as possible are good, whereas you are looking for shelves, drop-offs, flat spots and other features when it's cold. Some of the most uninspiring swims can have unseen features that attract fish, so talk to local anglers to gain a few clues. Here at Heronbrook, for instance, there are several swims with definite holes or channels that attract fish. A small foot-wide variation in depth is sometimes all you need for species to congregate around, so a heavy plummet is essential.

In winter I will always try and find a flat spot towards the far bank where I have three feet of water. This seems to be the optimum depth and anything less than two feet is normally a waste of time. If I cannot find this depth I will have a thorough search around for any flat area. Even on steeply sloping venues there is often a flattish spot somewhere, where the digger's bucket has compressed the bottom. A dinner-plate-sized area of uniform depth is all I'm after. Slopes are no good because the bait can roll down them and I want to know that I'm fishing the right depth all of the time.

The next best area to target is the very base of the far shelf. This is again where it starts to flatten off. I would rather fish here than straight down the middle because the shelf is a natural patrol route and any variation in depth helps to concentrate fish.

Summertime is completely different and, although I will still try and find shelves and flat spots, I am more interested in finding 18 inches to two feet of water right across to »



## ANGLER FILE

### JAMIE HUGHES

**Age:** 26

**Occupation:** Scaffolder

**Lives:** Wirral

**Sponsors:** Maver and Bag 'em Matchbaits

**Pole:** Daiwa Airtity

Jamie Hughes is one of the best commercial anglers in the country and a master on snake lakes.



## VENUE FILE

### HERONBROOK FISHERIES

**Location:** Slindon, Eccleshall, Staffordshire ST21 6LX

**Telephone:** 07879 441282

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



Kinder pots are a must-have accessory for dripping in tiny quantities of bait.

begin with. Any shallow plateau is good and I wouldn't be surprised to catch in half that depth when they start competing. At certain times, fishing in six inches of water or less can be deadly but there are always days when they prefer a deeper swim, so a 3ft-deep rig is still worth having set up.

**A good tip is to go straight in on the new swim with just your hook bait and no feed.**

The margins are definitely worth feeding, too. Even during summer I often find the deeper water at the base of the shelf better than the top of it, unless it is an evening session when the fish are mega-confident. I tend to choose somewhere no more than six or seven metres away in summer so that I can feed there by hand if necessary. In winter, any margin swim will be plumbed up in the deepest water and as far away from me as possible.

## FEEDING

On heavily fished venues like this the fish will often steer clear of piles of bait, especially during winter. I therefore rarely feed a swim prior to fishing it. One mistake that I see people make regularly is realising that there are a lot of fish in front of them and then spooking them by feeding a big pot of bait on their heads. I always like to think that there are fish in front of me, so I feed very sparingly when it's cold, such

as a pinch of pellets, half a dozen maggots or a dozen pinkies at a time. You can be more aggressive during summer but I still don't like to feed

big potsful because this will only lead to too many fish in the swim at one time.

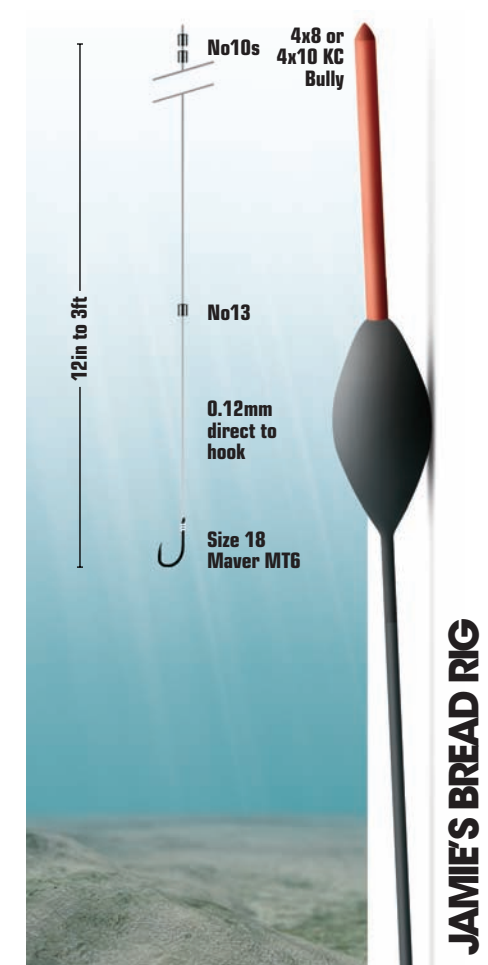
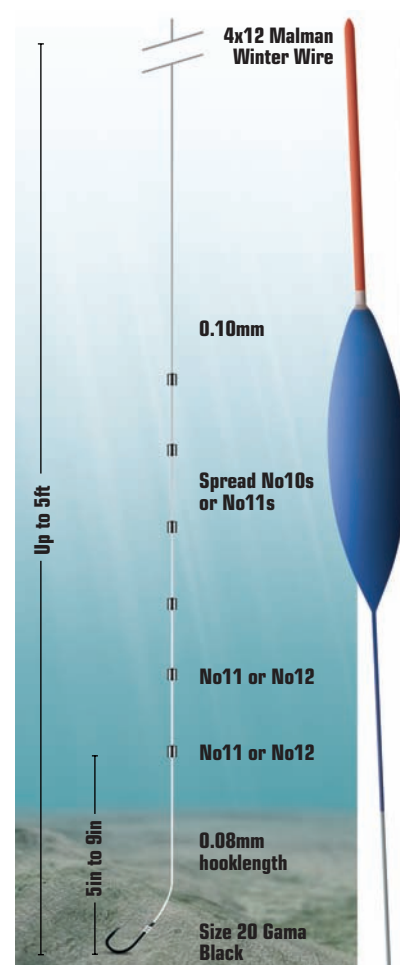
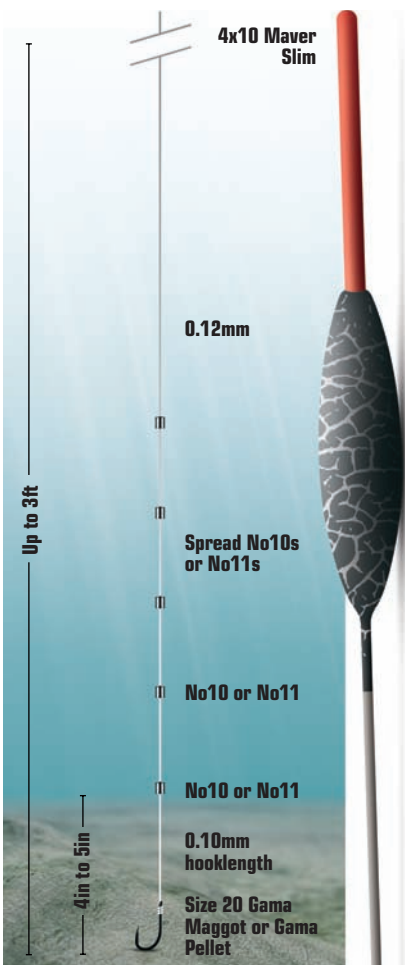
I rarely use a catapult on snake lakes. One exception is summertime when a few 4mm pellets catapulted over cupped-in micros can help to pull a few more fish in. Another situation is balmy days when the fish are right across with their backs out of the water. A bit of catapulted bait can have them in a frenzy and climbing out the lake for it!

I am always prepared to start up new swims. This is a key factor in winter because the fish will naturally back off once a few have been hooked. I will normally plumb up a new swim a metre or so away and start again. A good tip is to go straight in on the new swim with just your hook bait and no feed. This will often pick up a better fish before you actually start introducing a few loose samples.

## WHICH BAIT?

In winter my bait list will almost always include maggots, pinkies, a few slices of bread, micro pellets and 4mm expanders for the hook. In summer I will take micro pellets, bread, maggots if I expect barbel, 4mm feed pellets, expanders and 6mm cubes of meat.

I always pump my expanders and soak my feed pellets when I get to my peg rather than the night before. I am particularly fussy with hooker pellets. Light ones are better than darker batches and I like them to be nicely



Jamie's bait menu includes micros, 4mm expanders, maggots, pinkies, crushed expander and bread.



swollen and robust enough for the hook without going to mush if left in a bit of water. If you find a batch that you like, my advice is to buy as many bags as you can!

With live baits I use mostly red maggots and fluorescent pinkies but it doesn't do any harm to have other shades with you to try. Maggots are particularly effective for carp and F1s in winter but smaller pinkies are good on tougher days. The great thing with pinkies is that you can feed more of

Jamie always has some Bag 'em Xpanda in his bait bag.



A pinch of crushed expander plus a few dampened micros is enough to start most pellet swims.



them and they create a nice area to catch over. Two pinkies or a single red maggot over the top works particularly well.

Meat comes into its own for fishing down the edges. I rarely feed worms or casters on snake lakes but I will sometimes use a worm on the hook over other baits like meat and pellets because it stays on well. On really hot days when the fish are crawling up the far bank and waving at you, putting one or even two whole dendras on the hook over a big pot of pellets can be deadly!

## PRESENTING THE HOOK BAIT

Carp, and especially F1s, are extremely finicky biters, so fishing dead depth with pellets is crucial. I always like my expander pellet to scrape the bottom.

Live baits tend to be taken a little more confidently so I will happily lay on an inch or two with pinkies or maggots. Any further and I feel that you could be missing out on bites.

## CRUSHED EXPANDER

I always carry a bag of Bag 'em Xpanda groundbait. This is basically crushed expander pellets and is easy to mix up to a dry consistency with a bit of water. This creates a fish-attracting cloud of particles without actually giving the fish much to eat.

During summer I will often feed with a Kinder pot of micros and crushed expanders to begin with and keep topping up with smaller amounts every put-in. This combo is particularly effective with small F1s and stockies right across in the shallowest water. However, it is all too easy for the fish to become preoccupied with the crushed expanders and start gill-feeding on it so always introduce normal baits with it when it's warm.

When the weather gets colder I often use tiny pinches of crushed expanders to kick-start a swim. This is particularly effective on poorer areas and pulls all sorts of species in. You don't necessarily have to fish a pellet over the top either because maggots and pinkies are just as effective.

## FLOATS

I use 3x8 and 4x8 floats for up to two feet of water, 4x10 floats for up to three feet, 4x12s for up to five and 4x14 for anything deeper or adverse conditions.

In winter I use Malman Winter Wires for very sensitive work because they have a stable wire stem and fine fibre bristle. In good conditions and deeper water I like to



use a Maver Finesse, which has a plastic bristle. For pellets I often opt for a slightly thicker cane bristle that I can dot right down, so a Maver Slim fits the bill. For choppy conditions a wire-stemmed and hollow-tipped Maver Polar is better. For summer fishing in particularly shallow water or bread in winter, a small KC Carpa Bully, which has a hollow tip and carbon stem, sees the most use.

## THE RIGHT ELASTIC

I rarely use anything heavier than grey 8-11 Maver Dual Core or white Hydro for my snake-lake fishing and these are my chosen grades for proper carp in summer. For more delicate warm-water work, such as F1s, blue 5-9 Maver Dual Core is perfect. I will also use this for big fish in winter. For general winter work I prefer single lengths of standard No5 or No6 Maver elastic through a long match kit. There is not a massive difference



Jamie uses 9½in hooklengths and is not afraid of putting a shot on them.

between these two grades but the No5 sees more use on really hard days when I want to make absolutely sure that everything I hook ends up in the net.

Fish tend to fight less angrily on light elastics than they do with heavier ones because there is less pressure applied. Every top kit that I own is matched with a puller bung, so as long as the fish is hooked properly I am confident of getting it out. Remember, an 8lb carp is always worth taking your time with!

## HOOKS AND HOOKLENGTHS

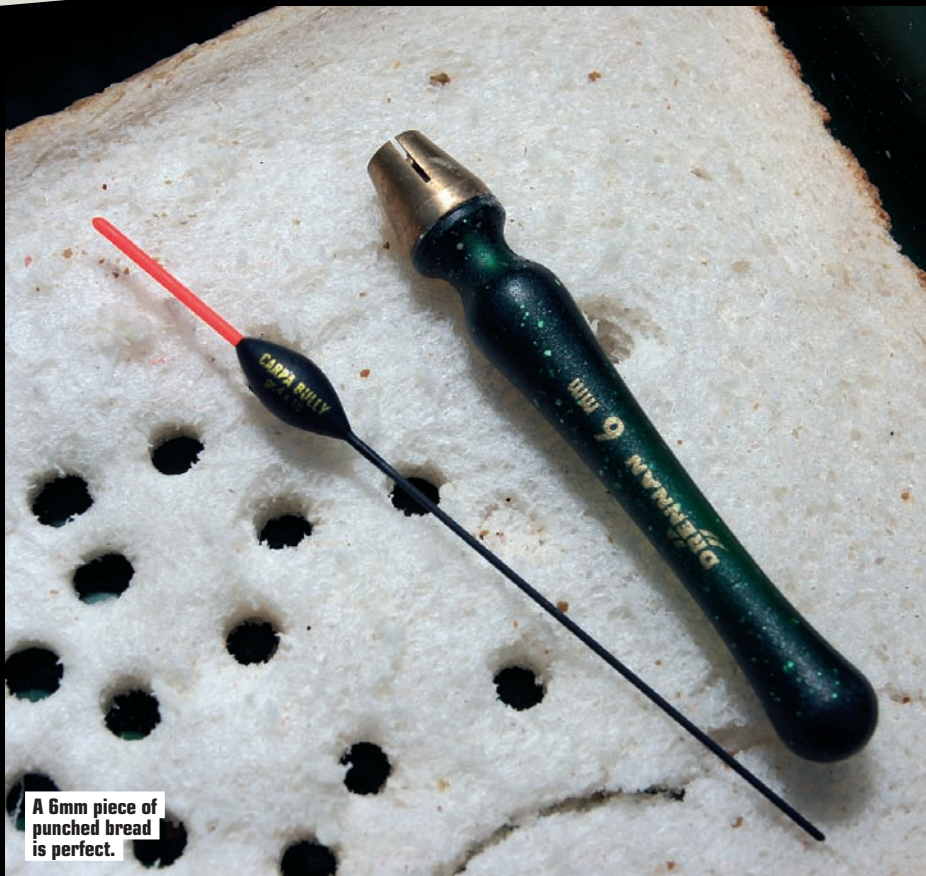
Compared to most people, I like to use small and relatively fine hooks. These work well when balanced with light elastics and

hooklengths. For summer pellet and meat fishing a size 18 Gama Pellet hook sees the most use, swapping to a size 20 in the colder months or a finer Gama Maggot when it's really hard.

I tend to use maggots more in winter and a size 20 Gama Black is good, or a size 22 Maver MT1 on rock-hard days.

For meat fishing in summer and anything 'nasty' I prefer a size 18 or 16 Maver MT3 and for bread up in the water a size 18 or even 20 MT6 is perfect.

I keep plenty of floats made up on pole winders but only shot them up and add a hooklength once I get to my peg. I use a wooden hooklength box and my traces are all 9½ inches long and tied to Genesis



A 6mm piece of punched bread is perfect.

## THE BREAD METHOD

There is one more method that I frequently use that requires absolutely no feeding whatsoever. It comes into its own on swims where lots of fish have shoaled up naturally, particularly reedy swims in the middle of a lake, wides, bends and other features. The fish are already happy where they are so there is no need to feed them. In fact, feeding can sometimes be the worst possible thing that you can do and it can push them out of the peg.

Heronbrook's Canal Pool is a perfect example and at certain times of the year you would think that all the fish are in

the reeds! I know that's an exaggeration but there are some considerable catches every year on this lake where the dense reed beds stick out several metres. These reeds are found in several swims in a row and with at least four to six feet of water directly in front of them they offer a perfect haven for fish of all sizes – particularly the bigger commons and mirrors. Even in the depths of winter these swims are more than capable of throwing up 100lb of fish and my bread method is one of the easiest and most effective ways to do it.

Bait-wise, all it takes is a couple of slices of white bread. I then use a Drennan

The rig is simple but effective.



breadpunch – usually 6mm – to punch out a disc for the hook. After punching I lick it to dampen it slightly, slide it onto the hook and then give it a slight squeeze to make sure that it sinks as slowly as possible.

Presenting a piece of bread tight to snags is a bit daunting so you need to be confident in your tackle. Even though I could be hooking proper carp from 2lb to 10lb, I won't go above 0.12mm Genesis Extreme II line fished direct to the hook when it's cold because the bait will not look natural enough.

My favourite hook is a Maver MT6 in a size 20 or 18, which is ultra-sharp and

Extreme line. I use 0.12mm or 0.14mm in summer for proper carp and 0.10mm for F1s. In the depths of winter I am happy to scale right down to 0.08mm for hard-to-catch skimmers and F1s.

## SHOTTING THE BRISTLE

I normally dot my float bristles down to a pimple on the surface. This makes it impossible to miss an indication and encourages you to react to anything. You may foul hook an odd fish but you also hit more proper bites. I lift into bites when using pellets but I still like to be a bit firmer on the strike with maggots to set the hook.

To get the optimum sensitivity I overshot my floats slightly and then use bristle grease

to pull them back up to the surface tension. I also like the pellet hook bait to register on the bristle for an even more sensitive setup. Small details like this make all the difference when you are trying to read bites as soon as the rig settles.

The last dropper is the most crucial shot on the rig, which is why I don't mind putting it on the hooklength itself to get it as close to the hook as necessary. The last shot must register on the float bristle, so don't use a dropper that is too small.

When I'm using maggots I normally start with a No11 or No12 pushed up to the top of the hooklength loop. However, you need to see the bite quicker with pellets, so I often use a more positive No10 or No11 placed

four or five inches away instead. The position and the size of this last shot really can make all the difference, so you should never be afraid to experiment.



Overshot your float and then grease it up for ultimate sensitivity.



Stick-ups like these offer a natural haven for carp.



Jamie rarely visits a snake lake without a slice or two of bread.

robust. Presenting a natural-looking offering is essential, so I use a tiny, strong, hollow-bristled float such as a 4x8 or 4x10 KC Bully. All the shot needed to cock the float is placed immediately below the carbon stem so that the bristle stands proud. I then have just one tiny No13 placed halfway down the line to help it break the surface tension. This, together with the bread swelling, will sink the float bristle down a bit more so I know it has reached the correct depth.

The actual depth that you set the rig is perhaps the trickiest part of the puzzle and I will vary it from as little as 10 inches to

as much as three feet. Around 18 inches to two feet is a good starting guide but even in the depths of winter you can catch 12 inches deep at times. If you are missing bites and/or foul hooking fish, shallow up a few inches at a time. If you are not getting any bites yet the reeds are knocking, then go deeper.

Reed movement is the best indicator for where to drop your rig. The problem on deep swims is that when the reeds knock, the fish could be anywhere up to six feet down. I am convinced that the fish have specific patrol routes through the reeds and that's why you can drop it into one spot

and get 20 fish in 20 drops, yet drop the rig in a foot away and not get an indication.

If there is a hungry carp in the peg, though, I expect a bite just before or after the float settles. A confident lift is all that's needed, plus some fast shipping back.

My elastic is either blue 5-9 Maver Dual Core Extreme for small carp or white Hydro for bigger ones. I am a firm believer in not going any stronger because the more you pull a fish the more it pulls back.

That's all there is to it. The rigs are simple, there's no feeding involved and it catches some of the biggest fish in the lake. What could be easier or more enjoyable?