

Fishing Activity

Don Moxom

Chesil Bank and the Fleet Nature Reserve

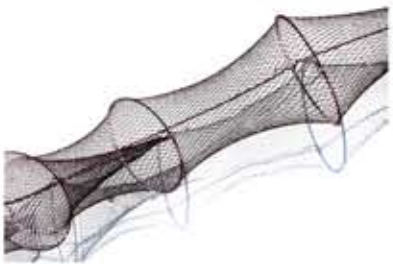


During the 1400's and 1500's, the mackerel fishery off Chesil Bank was thriving. Now it has all but died out. But Chesil still buzzes with fishing activity being one of country's top sites for recreational angling. In the Fleet the ancient eel fishery continues to flourish, mullet are occasionally targeted by fishermen using gill nets, and under license, small quantities of non-commercial species are taken for aquaria.



Seine fishing

One end of the long, comparatively narrow net is held by men on the beach, whilst a boat takes the net to sea and drops it in a curved line returning to the shore and a few colleagues some distance away. The two groups of men then pull in both ends of the net and walk towards each other. Up to 500 stone of mackerel may be caught.



Eel fishing

Fyke nets are used to catch the eels that are found in the Fleet's sea-grass beds. The nets are set in pairs. The season is from April- September. There is an overall maximum of 100 nets used in the Fleet. The activity is licensed by Ilchester Estates as seabed owners and the Environment Agency (as opposed to the Southern Sea Fisheries) as the eel is classed as a freshwater species.



Collection of fish for display purposes

The Marine Management Organisation permit the collection of certain species and undersize fish in the Fleet for display purposes. Collecting is infrequent and a number of conditions are required to be fulfilled. The fish are mainly required by Sea Life Centres. It is considered that this project creates awareness of British fish life especially of some of the rarer non-commercial fish and their habitats. Scientific data on the catch is gathered.



Gill-nets in the Fleet

This is another long established fishing activity in the Fleet but is not practised much today. Gill-netting is usually carried out by two men working from a boat. The large mesh net, corked and weighted, is paid out in a semi-circle and fish are driven towards it. The net is hauled in on the shore and the fish taken from it. Mullet caught in the Fleet can weigh over two kilograms and be good to eat.

Angling

In the spring and summer many daytime anglers 'feather' for mackerel. In the colder months, the more hardy angler fishes throughout the night for cod, codling, flatfish, etc. Anglers are protected by warm clothing and shelter in their 'buddies'. These are small bivouac type tents with a specially designed fold to hold pebbles that provide anchorage in strong winds. Competitions offering cash prizes attract hundreds of anglers.

