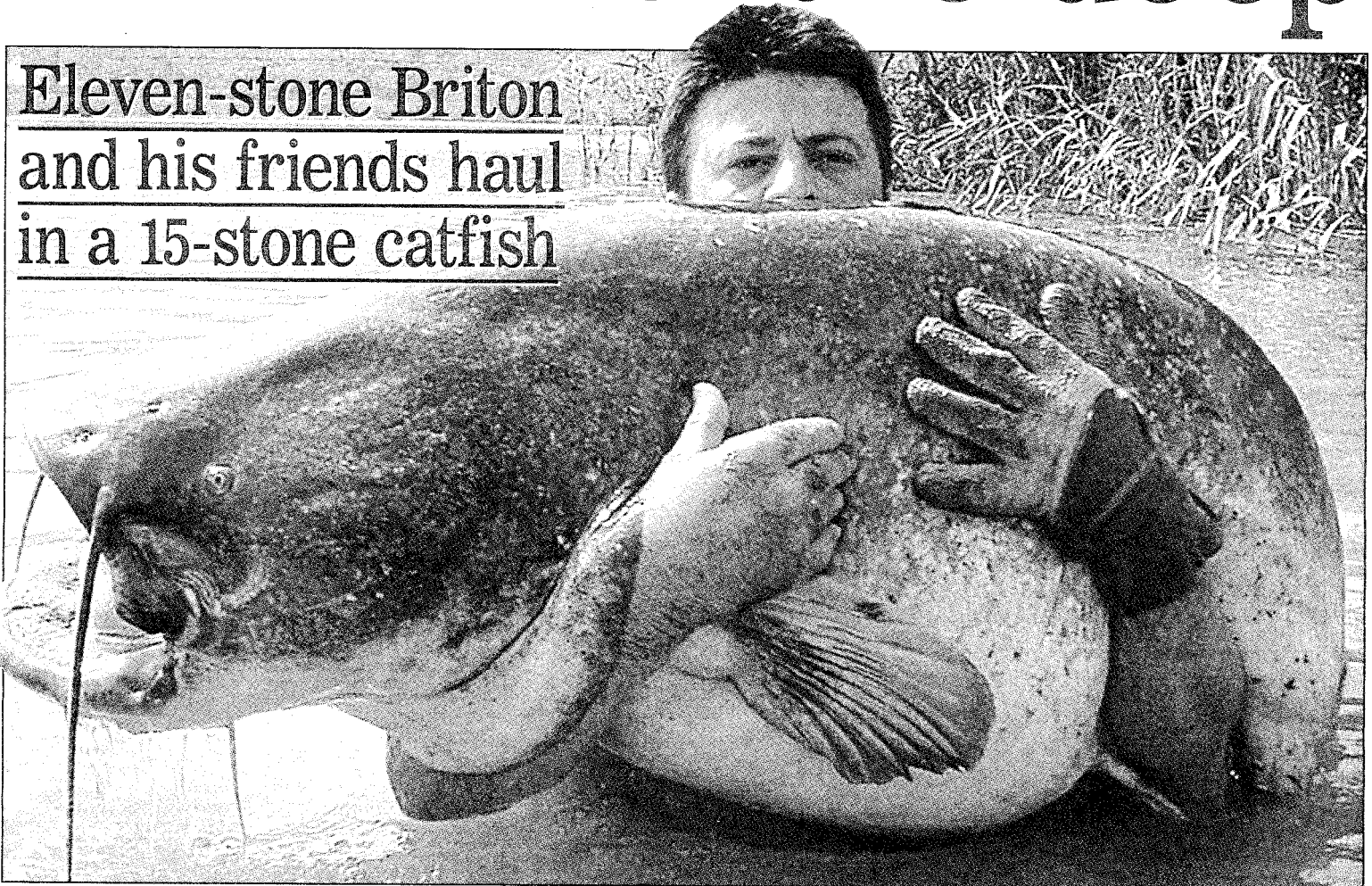


Monster of the deep

**Eleven-stone Briton
and his friends haul
in a 15-stone catfish**



The one that didn't get away: Duncan Rooke struggles to hold the catfish aloft before returning it to the river

WHEN Duncan Rooke landed the biggest freshwater fish ever caught by a British angler, he was keen to celebrate as soon as possible.

But as the picture shows, he had his hands full at the time.

The record catch was a 211lb catfish - just over 15 stone and therefore four stone heavier than Mr Rooke himself.

He and three other Britons landed the 7ft 7in female on the last night of a trip to the River Ebro, near Barcelona. He said his rod almost broke in two as the fish took his bait of halibut pellets at about 10.30pm.

'She took the line and just kept on going,' added Mr Rooke, a 30-year-old gas engi-

Daily Mail Reporter

neer from Woking, Surrey. 'When it ran out she dragged me off the bank and on to the rocks but luckily I managed to stop myself from going much further.'

Trip organiser Stephen Buss, also 30, from Bordon in Hampshire, said: 'We knew she was going to be big when the rod bent over double but we had no idea she'd be that big.'

'Duncan really struggled to get a grip as the fish took his line and headed down the river. At one point she nearly took him for a swim.'

'I pulled Duncan back from the edge of the water and then jumped into our rowing boat to turn her back.'

'I managed to steer the fish to about 100 yards off the

bank, then rowed back to join the others.'

'It was only when all of us were pulling her in and she surfaced that we saw her in all her glory and realised she was a bit of a monster.'

'Catfish are always reluctant at coming in and this one snapped and clamped on to Duncan's hand and tried to take him back out with her.'

'Two of us nearly had a hernia lifting her up the bank and we were shattered afterwards but we still had the energy to cheer and dance around her.'

The anglers kept the fish on the bank until dawn, pouring water over it to keep it alive, until an independent witness arrived to verify the catch.

After posing for pictures with the catfish, the largest ever caught in Spain, they put it back into the water. Simon

Clarke, of the International Game Fishing Association, said: 'The UK record for a freshwater fish is 130lb.'

'Anybody who lands a fish that size has done very well just to get it on to the scales. Anything over 100lb is going to be very strong so it is a tremendous achievement.'

The European record for the biggest freshwater fish stands at 294lb - a catfish caught in the River Po in Italy.

The world's largest, a Mekong Giant catfish, was caught only a few weeks ago by commercial net fishermen in Thailand.

It weighed an astonishing 646lb - more than 46 stone.

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