

Hi Everyone,

I hope you're all getting out and about and catching a few.

After returning from my trip to Belgium in late April I was chomping at the bit to get straight back on the ferry and do some more angling in the French sun!

I've just returned from a week in the Oise region of France, which is only a couple of hours drive from Calais. With the poor exchange rate at the moment I'm a little less inclined to do the long journeys down into central France and further a field purely as it is so expensive in fuel and tolls, so for the time being my future trips will mainly be in northern France and Belgium where travel costs are minimal.

I had planned this trip back in the winter with my good mate Nick Helleur after a few tip offs from some of Nick's Belgian mates who said the water in question was worth a look. As is often the way, information on the lesser known venues can be hard to come by but we had soon collated quite a portfolio of pictures and catch reports from French websites etc, and the stock was impressive - plenty of fish over 40lb including a fair head of real bigguns up to around 60lb; so we were keen to get over there and have a go ourselves.



*Lovely 34 pounder, empty after spawning*

After booking the ferry and sorting all the other bits and bobs, I drove up to Watford to pick Nick up on Saturday 24th May; and after loading the car were soon at Dover waiting for an early boat to Calais. It was apparent that despite the summery feel to the weather during the day, the nights were still quite chilly and I was wondering how this may affect our prospects as we made our way down the auto-route early the next morning. Upon arrival at the lake, and after a quick supermarket visit to grab a few supplies, we were soon plotted up in a good looking swim which commanded a nice, quiet area of the lake's 40 acres. There was an out-of-bounds area down to our right which immediately looked an obvious fish holding area, and as we set up this became very apparent as to put it mildly, there were carp everywhere! There had to be at least 150 fish clearly visible drifting about in the upper layers in

front of us, and in amongst the numerous 30lb fish there were some huge mirrors and commons to be seen - some clearly still carrying some spawn despite the majority of the stock having spawned a week or so prior to our arrival. Despite the tiredness and draining heat we were both quick to get a couple of rods out each and, as no boats are allowed, we just whacked the rigs out along the margin to our right in the general area where most of the fish were showing. A while later we were joined by Nick's mate Bill, who would be fishing to our left; he was also set up and fishing quite quickly, no doubt spurred on by the sight of so many whackers in 'our' water.

A few hours later, and with the barbecue in full swing, I had a violent take on one of my rods fished along the right hand margin. The fish felt heavy, and I was more than a little nervous after seeing so many bigguns on view during the afternoon. A five minute tussle under the rod tip ensued as the margins sloped away to around 12 ft, but I was using strong hooks on substantial tackle and was soon admiring a nice chestnut coloured mirror sitting quietly in the net. At 41lb 8oz, I was buzzing as Nick and Bill took a few shots before I slipped him back to re-join his mates leaving me a hurried few minutes to tie a new rig and get the rod back in position before dark.

We had decided to concentrate mainly on using just boilies as our main feed due to the presence of large sturgeon and other nuisance species, so before darkness fell properly we set about giving the swim some food to be going on with. I had brought around 35kg of Odyssey XXX- air dried in 22mm diameter, and these flew out in the throwing stick nice and easily, so baiting up was quite a simple task for a change. We all put around 2kg each over our chosen areas; not filling it in, but hopefully enough bait to gain a reaction from the fish we had in evidence and hopefully get a bite or two.



*First bite of the trip*

Little did we know how successful this would turn out to be! The next morning we were all nursing bloodshot

eyes and wet unhooking mats, as it had been a busy night. I'll spare all the finite details from now on, as the rest of the week carried on in the same vein really. We had around 10 runs between us that night, with Nick catching a common and mirror of 37 and 38lb respectively.

I had a couple of fish, one an upper 20 and another of low 30s and we also lost a few. The takes were just savage; "takes of death" as they became known during the week, and I'm sure some of the fish were lost purely due to the



*Mid 30 early morning Mirror*

speed of the initial run putting extra strain on the hook-hold. Day 2 was to be quite memorable for a weather related incident! The day itself was beautiful; really hot but with building humidity towards the evening, and after setting all of our rods for the anticipated nighttime carnage we were sat quietly watching the fish jumping out and rolling over our baited areas. An hour or so before dusk there was a noticeable drop in air pressure and we heard thunder rolling in the distance.



***30lb Mirror in the rain***

Around 9pm, and with forked lightning now well in evidence overhead, I had the unthinkable; two takes at once! Call me a coward if you wish but I was bricking it as I stood there waving a 13ft lightning conductor in the air above my head! Both fish were swiftly landed and returned, one an upper double and the other a nice 33lb mirror as the storm intensified overhead. Nick and Bill both set up their tripods to take some long exposure shots of the lightning while I looked skywards in awe of the unfolding spectacle above. Around midnight we had all retired to our beds when events suddenly took a turn for the worse. The lightning was now coming to earth, seemingly every couple of seconds, and in the flashes I noticed the tall poplar trees down to our right were

starting to sway a bit- then a bit more, and then proper bending over like in an autumnal gale. Next thing I was aware of a tremendous roar as a

enormous gust of wind came from behind my bivvy, ripping the pegs out on one side and literally flattening the bivvy roof against me as I lay on my bedchair. I simply gripped the side panel of the shelter, pulled it towards me and held on as the wind just howled like I'd never heard before. The force was just incredible, and I watched in utter disbelief as all of our rods were dispatched from their rests into the lake, along with nets, mats, water bottles - in fact everything which wasn't nailed down. Amazingly a set of stainless goalpost bars was even blown out the ground by the force of the wind! After a couple of minutes the gust had subsided enough to feel safe to let go of the bivvy and assess the chaos. By now the rain was almost biblical and as we all ran around trying to get things sorted I must admit to feeling a massive adrenalin rush, but also had the feeling we'd had a lucky escape.

The next morning there were reports on French radio of tornado, yes tornado damage across parts of northern France

and there you have it....we'd survived a twister! Mental stuff, and it was a night I'd never forget as long as I'm still fishing, that's for sure. The next morning we spent a few hours generally getting sorted and re-positioning the rigs as most of the rods had literally been blown off the rests and dumped in the lake during the night's events. We were still getting the odd bite during the day, mainly one of my rods, which was fishing in a shallower area of around 8ft which the fish obviously found to their liking in daylight hours. Towards evening I started to receive more action, and my tally for the day ended on six runs and six fish landed, which was pleasing to say the least.



***Nice mid 30***

In amongst some upper twenties were three more thirties so the average weight of the fish was excellent really. All of the fish seemed in really good condition, despite having recently spawned, and seemed very fit, often giving protracted fights of fifteen minutes or more. The action continued unabated during the night but seemed to transfer to Nick and Bill's rods, perhaps due to the fact that they were fishing in slightly deeper water of around fourteen feet, which the fish seemed to prefer during the hours of darkness. The weather had now settled into a spell of breezy, cloudy low pressure which always seems to encourage good feeding conditions at this time of year; so we took full advantage by keeping the swim topped up with bait on a regular basis. Several times during the day we would introduce two or three kilo's of bait with the throwing stick, scattering it widely to ensure the fish had to actively go looking for more once they had a taste. This seems to be a great method for fishing in France on the larger waters and is one I employ with regular success.



***We were catching on boilies, but someone was feeding them a few tigers!***

The latter part of the week was soon upon us and, to be honest, we were all struggling a little bit with extreme tiredness! As daft as it sounds, sitting around all day seems to make you feel more tired than when you're rushing about at work; and the weather had now turned full circle back to high pressure, crystal blue skies and temperatures in the high twenties or higher. This only seemed to encourage the numerous carp in evidence to save all of their feeding activity until dark, when all hell let loose; we were having upwards of ten runs each night between us. Several times we had two on at once, and mornings would find us with two or three fish in sacks and several more propped up in landing nets, staked out in the cool deep margins awaiting a photo. I had a steady stream of thirty pounders paraded for the camera, but couldn't seem to keep a hook into one of the bigger ones, despite hooking and loosing a couple which felt the 'real deal' so to speak.

Nick and Bill, on the other hand, were getting stuck into some fish of a better stamp, with Nick catching four forties, and two fifties in the last two days. Bill also managed a lovely slate grey coloured mirror of forty-six pounds, which was a p.b. for him, so we were sure to open a bottle of wine that evening and toast his success. Before we knew it, it was time to chuck the kit in the car and head back to Calais and then the long slog back home to Ringwood. All in all it had been a cracking trip with around sixty fish between us, and we will certainly be going back at some stage, possibly in the autumn when the fish will be looking for a serious feed up before the

colder weather arrives. Better get my bait order in now then...!

See you next month.

Tight lines, Mike



*Lovely 36lb Mirror, one of many that size caught during the week.*