

LE MOULIN DE GRAFFEUIL

A FRENCH REDMIRE POOL IN THE MAKING...

TOP UK CARPER AND MAXIMUM CARP EDITOR, JOHN KNEEBONE CROSSES THE CHANNEL INTO FRANCE TO SAMPLE THE FISHING AND HOSPITALITY OF THE BEAUTIFUL LE MOULIN DE GRAFFEUIL FISHERY - A VENUE HE'S REFERRING TO AS THE 'FRENCH REDMIRE POOL'



JOHN KNEEBONE



JOHN KNEEBONE AND JACK BROWN



fter being the initial cause for my work deadline being a tad tighter than usual and a pretty hectic couple of weeks, it was a weeklong fishing trip to France that was to now provide the perfect tonic and a chance to chill out. Bedfordshire carper, Jack Brown would be accompanying me on the trip and with neither of us (especially me) living

too close to Dover, we decided to meet in Cornwall and take the Plymouth to Roscoff night crossing ferry into France.

This move resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of French driving time and even allowing room for a couple of beers and a good kip on the first leg of the journey. As we arrived in port for around 8am on a Monday morning, fuelled by a cooked breakfast, fresh, bright and

ready for the six-hours or so drive south to the Limousin region of France and our destination: Le Moulin de Graffeuil.

Despite a moment where young Jack saw his life flash in front of his eyes thanks to a Senna-like swerve by yours truly between some bollards and a sudden halt in traffic (sorry Mr. and Mrs. Brown, but the colour did eventually return to his face once he'd taken his head out of his hands) the drive



Our home for the week



The picturesque Le Moulin de Graffeuil from the wider end of the lake and the dam bank



The view down the lake from the inlet stream



The venue was more like an English estate lake – there was even an old bicycle ready for ‘A Passion for Angling’ star to ride down to the water!



The on-site gite was just one the great facilities available



The path that took us through the dense woods down to the lake



The traps are set for the day ahead

down through the non-toll roads was pleasantly quiet.

Arriving mid-afternoon we were met by fishery owner Tony Senior and a very welcome cold beer. After a quick run down on our journey, the route of which Tony was keen to add to a list of directions on the fisheries website, we were joined by Tony's wife Helen and taken on a guided tour of the fishery. Quite simply it was one 'wow' after another – and a few short steps down from the main dining area we walked into the fishery gite, consisting of a living area, full kitchen and two bedrooms each with shower.

Across from the main house was a large converted barn complete with gym, a bait freezer as well as rods, reels bedchairs etc. These are available to anyone not wishing to transport all their kit or customers choosing to fly into Limoges Airport where they'd be collected by Tony and Helen. With all this on offer, Tony still somehow felt the need to apologise for the neatly

“CASTING SUPER TIGHT TO FAR MARGIN, JACK RECEIVED A BITE WITHIN MINUTES EACH TIME.”

stacked building materials at the back of the barn. But why he was apologising for these materials ready to build a small outdoor swimming pool is beyond me! We'd not yet walked to the lake, but our first impression was already one that Helen and Tony were looking to provide anglers with everything they could possible need.

Leaving the house and barn behind we then walked down to the main lake, where

once again we were suitably impressed. Set within eighty-plus-acres of private woodland, the lake of around nine- to ten-acres in size was simply stunning. As we walked around the inlet stream that feeds the lake, Tony talked of the lake's history prior to their purchase and how it was drained in the November of 2012 to remove the silver fish ahead of a stocking program that introduced some 200 carp ranging from twenty- to fifty-pounds.

It didn't take long to find evidence of the fish, firstly colouring-up the shallows and then bow-waving away from the bank as we walked down the margin of the non-fishing bank. Surrounded by mature trees and thick woodland it felt more like walking around an old English estate lake – a similarity that only increased as we crossed the sluice onto the dam bank at the far end of this long, gradually widening lake. With numerous fish sightings right the way along the margins of the non-fishing bank, we now



Casting tight to the far margin proved to be the most effective tactic



The fishing was prolific from the off



Putting back another hard fighting carp



One in the net for Jack



Big shoulders and high back – another fast growing French carp



Getting in the shallow water to play and net fish made things a lot easier



Bright balanced 'waiters' were proving to be the one



The first thirty of the trip



A rotary lead set-up gave a great presentation over the silt

had the challenge of choosing one of the six swims from the opposite bank; a challenge as they all commanded enough water for two anglers and all looked equally promising? With a week's fishing ahead of us and plenty of time to manoeuvre if needed, we opted to begin in one of the central swims, Peg Three and see how we got on?

TIME FOR SOME ACTION

With all our kit in the swim cabin, ready and prepared for our first night on the lake we headed back to the house and dining room for the evening meal. Three courses gave plenty of time to discuss tactics where we settled on using each of our three rods with a different presentation to try and ascertain what might be the best

approach. With it being our first night and the tiredness of our travelling setting in, we also decided that should we receive any action we'd not recast that rod. Well, that was the plan but one-by-one through the night each rod produced a fish from our different tactics varying from small baits and pellets to Snowman rigs and boilies.

None the wiser from our results but happy all the same, we headed back to the house for breakfast for 10am which turned out to be perfectly timed as it absolutely poured down with rain as we tucked into our full-English.

Back in the swim, we looked to gain some more knowledge of the layout and after a bit of leading, prodding and wading about, we soon had a good understanding of the

lakebed. Fairly shallow with deeper water to the right, the majority of the lakebed consisted of silt with veins of slightly raised gravel – best found by wading until you could feel the gravel with the sole of your boot.

Using the 'Two Bankstick Trick' we soon had rods clipped-up and cast super tight to far margin where Jack received a bite within minutes of casting to an area he'd pre-baited prior to breakfast – a nice 29lb 14oz mirror being the result. A second fish quickly followed the recast, before we again met Helen and Tony for a superb evening meal.

By breakfast the following morning another eight fish had hit our nets and we'd learnt a few things. Firstly, that the far margin was the 'hottest' bite area so far and that a bright and balanced wafting hookbait armed with a small golf ball-sized bag of pellets was the deadly method. We would encounter sudden feeding spells where Jack would begin to receive the first bites to his right-hand rods – that would gradually filter towards mine on the left of our swim. It was becoming evident that the bulk of fish were probably located to our right and the shallows of the lake; a theory that led to us moving into the next swim to our right: Peg Two. The move was a good one, leading



Another bites the dust!



Nailed



Another shot of the big girl!



No need for a bivvy – every swim had its own double cabin



The far margin kept producing the fish



Most of our bites came from the shallows



The biggest fish of the trip: 36lb 14oz

to another 19 fish hitting Jack's net in the main as I hit a spell of bad luck losing four fish on the bounce at one point.

Three thirty-pound fish were included within the haul of fish landed by Jack, one of which being a 36lb 14oz mirror carp known as 'Friendly' that had weighed in at well over forty a few weeks earlier prior to the fish spawning. The sport we were enjoying at this point was absolutely superb and we had established a well-rehearsed routine of playing and netting each other's fish by wading out into the water. The fish were simply so powerful – travelling on long, direct runs in the shallow water that were almost unstoppable at times. Watching these young fish bow-wave from the sight of the waiting net for ten, twenty, thirty yards or more before you could again start coaching them back to the net was arm-achingly awesome!

HANGOVER TIME!

We were having the time of our lives – that is until the hangover! Each evening we'd enjoyed a fantastic home cooked feast (the word 'meal' simply wouldn't

“THE FISH WERE SIMPLY SO POWERFUL; ALMOST UNSTOPPABLE AT TIMES.”

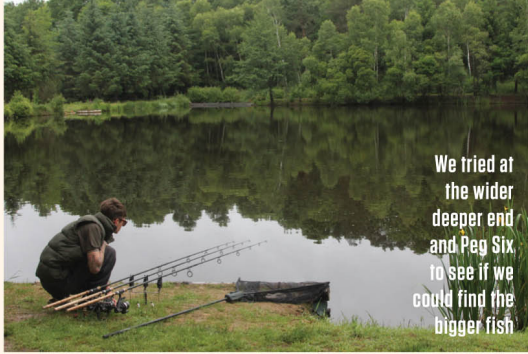
do the three-course banquet any justice) along with some local red wine. On this particular evening our host, Tony (who I blame completely) decided we should sample a new label. Well, let's just say the wine ended up flowing as much as the conversation, so much so that Jack and I decided to take a break from the night fishing when we returned to our cabin with a couple of beers. After all, we had come to France to experience the holiday side of the trip as much as the fishing – a nice philosophy until we woke the next day with the headache from hell!

Until now we only used the gite for a daily shower, just before the evening meal, but now it was to come to the rescue. Combined with a heavy dose of Paracetamol, a kip in one of the beds provided the perfect remedy to the night before – at least enough for us to face another cooked breakfast. Although I'm not sure Jack was quite ready for his smoked salmon on toast with scrambled eggs!

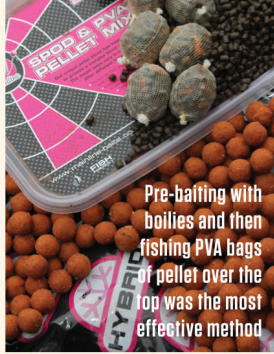
After a little banter and Tony promising not to buy that particular label of wine again, we made our way back to the lake somehow and rather oddly refreshed by our 'do or die' breakfast.

The heavy downpours of rain we experienced so far during the week were now beginning to have an effect on the carp. With the inlet stream bringing a steady flow of chocolate-coloured water into what had been the crystal clear water of the shallows and Pegs One and Two. The fish were clearly attracted to this coloured water with the continuous action leading to another move – further into the shallows and Peg One. Baiting the far margin with a little mixed particle, pellets as well as chopped and whole boilies just before our meals proving to be a devastating tactic by an almost guaranteed bite as soon as the rods were back out.

With the lake holding a high number of big carp, bigger than the mid-twenties we were averaging, we were beginning



We tried at the wider deeper end and Peg Six to see if we could find the bigger fish



Pre-baiting with boilies and then fishing PVA bags of pellet over the top was the most effective method



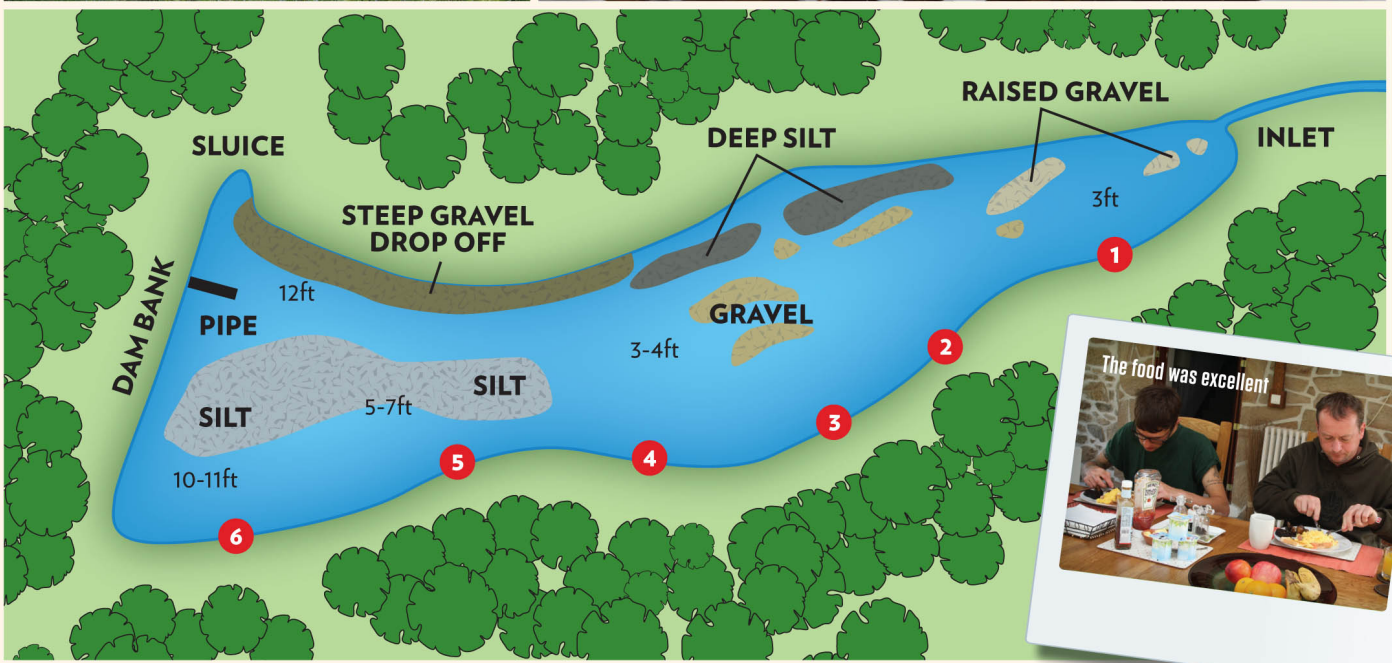
Another one for Jack



On a pre-baiting mission



Two from the last day of an extremely enjoyable weeks fishing in France!



to wonder if the larger residents to over fifty-pounds might be lurking in the deeper water at the other end of the lake. The area off the dam bank and sluice where the depth of water dropped to around twelve-feet. There was only one way to find out and that was to move-up to the last swim, Peg Six. Yet again this was a fantastically picturesque setting in which to fish, although the far margin feature that had been so kind to us was now a good chuck around the hundred-yard mark nearest the sluice. So we again decided to spread our bets by fishing mid-water spots as well as those tight to the far bank. We did see a few fish roll, close to the dam bank, but there was clearly fewer fish in this area. Although the gamble of catching a better fish almost paid off when Jack landed a 29lb 5oz fish during the penultimate night of the trip.

‘WOW – SIMPLY WOW’

With the need for an early start the following day to head back to Roscoff and our return ferry, we decided to spend our final day fishing back in Peg One before packing the van. For our last evening meal of the week, Helen (Tony and Helen both take turns to cook) cooked the best, most mouth-watering slow roasted lamb I have ever tasted which typified the great week Jack and I had enjoyed.

The stamp of fishing was excellent and one where anglers of every levels could enjoy themselves - and if you really went for it you could rack-up a very high number of fish. On the other hand we found that the action throughout the daylight hours was more than prolific enough to take a break from the lake at night if you so wished. Perhaps utilising the gym, gite and its free Wi-Fi to maintain a steady flow of relaxation. Of course, with

the availability of the gite, the fishery is also a great venue for anglers accompanied by their partners or family. There is even a small pond full of ‘wild-carp’ next to the house should any junior wish to feel a tug on the line.

For me, one of the best aspects of Le Moulin de Graffeuil was the fishery owners, Tony and Helen Senior. We were given a freedom to fish how and when we wanted, a choice of eating times compatible with our fishing and our ‘bite times’ and the standard of food was superb. Obviously the fishery is Tony and Helen’s business, but we were never made to feel like that was their priority – not at all! We experienced a weeklong fishing holiday where our enjoyment of that week was their absolute priority, which is exactly what we received – a highly recommended, brilliant week’s fishing!

JOHN KNEEBONE