

Article Written By Marcus Tackley (From Oldham) – September 2008

We took a family holiday to La Couarde (carpfishingfrance.net) my wife being the ever patient carp fishing widow found the destination which was quickly booked and paid for from 26th Sept to 3rd October. Seeing as we have two children under 3 years of age I firmly set my stall out not to be doing much fishing. As such I took the mandatory 3 rods, delks, net and a couple of bank sticks along with several kilo's of Solar Carp Food and some float gear seeing as the lake was only an acre in size, this gave me plenty of opportunities to stalk!

The accommodation was incredible and included a bar area, Sky TV in every room, a pool table, air hockey, table tennis, table football and fruit machine/games machine in the basement with Playstation II and games, an outdoor heated swimming pool, play area for the kids, outdoor bowling alley, badminton and football pitch. Needless to say fishing could happily take a back seat whilst we chilled out and drank in the early autumn sunshine..... However, the little lake was fantastic, with carp in there up to mid 40's and cats well in to their 50's I was dying to get some bait out and observe the lake in the evening light!

First night, the family took precedence and we settled in and unpacked and made sure the children were happy and comfortable, just before dark I took several kilo's of supplied pellets down to the lake for my first good look. In the twilight I could make out bubble clouds all around the lake as carp got their heads stuck in the mud feeding on the naturals. I selected several spots at random having not explored the lake bed and put about a kilo of pellets on each spot. I made my way back around the lake and saw a catfish 'tail' snakelike out of the water hunting a shoal of small roach as I approached the north west corner, not being acclimatized to my new environment I nearly fell in the lake with shock but quickly made my way back up the garden to the house with my heart in my mouth and the sound of blood pumping through my ears!

I opened a bottle of the local vin rouge and quickly set about getting the rods made up and rigs tied in readiness for the go-ahead from the wife the next day and we spent some time outside on the patio chilling out after a stressful days travel feeding a couple of wild kittens! La Couarde is set in the middle of nowhere so being faced with absolute and complete silence was worth the money alone! We took a reasonably early night and as usual were up at 5:30 with the kiddies, light didn't come until around 7:45 at this time of year so we all took breakfast and played with the children until Linc – our youngest son – got tired again and it was suddenly my time to shine! We'd agreed that when Lincoln was ready to sleep in the morning I'd push him down to the lake and fish whilst he was asleep and my wife would keep Charlotte entertained. This effectively gave me a window of 2 hours just after first light in which to ply my trade and see if I could get in to some of the bigger residents of the lake.

I crept up to the two spots I fed the night before but there was no visible signs of feeding here, so feeling the clock ticking I rigged up two rods, one with double 14mil Carp Food and a balanced Solar snowman in bags full of pellets and selected two likely spots, the third was rigged with a float, fishing sweet corn in the margins the day was cold but with beautiful sunshine and not a breath of wind. Having a hectic day to day life in which I'm constantly stuck to work having email on my PDA and two mobiles I forgot my phones, unfortunately having left them at home ☹ this was exactly the tonic I needed as I'd not had a holiday in 5 years without some form of contact with the office so most of the morning was spent relaxing in to my new found little piece of heaven!

All too quickly Linc woke up and my morning session was complete but I had found out the lake was hugely silty being almost totally surrounded by trees and having a stream feed in and out of the lake. I discovered most of the lake was less than 4ft deep and even an underarm cast would bury the lead a good 6 inches with the top end of the lake where the stream entered being no more than 2ft 6". Still, it was only the 2nd day of our holiday so plenty of time left to explore!

After a day in the pool and generally messing around we all took a stroll round to the far side of the lake and sat in the warm afternoon sun playing with sticks and moss, my wife fishes and has been on several trips to the St Lawrence and over to France carp fishing with me, but having had children perhaps hadn't put fishing at the top of her priorities lately, however watching the occasional tail swirl and bubble cloud exploding from the lake bed even got her carpy juices flowing (!!)

It was agreed the following day we'd have a picnic on the bank with the children and we may get to have another couple of hours fishing.

The next morning following the same routine I made my way back down to the lake and took the same approach this time leaving my rods 20 yards down the bank and placing PVA bags right in the margins hoping my silence wouldn't push the fish away from this nearside bank. The float went out again and after an hour the bubbling significantly increased around the float as fish moved against the slack line. As my heart rate hit about 160BPM's my son woke up and started crying so I had to abandon my silent vigil and go and sort him out. We had a lovely picnic side having stocked up on bread, cheese and wine and played with the children, we had the rods out but it was understandably noisy so my third session again ended with a blank.

Later that afternoon both the children were tired and a little grumpy so we put them in the car seats and set off for a little drive as this is a sure fire way of getting them to sleep, sure enough less than 2 miles later both were snoring gently and dribbling on the car seats so I attempted a 9 point turn in a left hand drive manual Picasso and we headed back down the country lanes to La Couarde both eager to get an hour or so in before they woke up. Like a military planned operation I stopped half way up the drive next to the lake, we co-ordinated our door opening and closing strategy and scrambled down the bank in a hurry to get the rods out. Ali was happy taking the float rod as she'd taken carp to 35lb and cats to 46lb in the past on the float and I looked after the other two rods.

I picked up both rods and took them as quietly over to the far bank which I'm sure is rarely fished from on a week to week basis along with the bait and quietly settled myself in to a corner. As I'd just ghosted myself in to a swim I happened to glance over to Ali who was crouched over her float rod ready to strike, I had a quiet smile to myself having seen the fry attack the float earlier in the week and expecting she was experiencing the same thing but perceiving it to be a bite. I looked away and concentrated on my own rig but glanced up again seconds later to see her rod bent double! She hadn't said a word to me so I said 'you in then' she said 'yeah' so I dropped everything and sprinted round to give her a hand netting the fish. I reached her side with the net and said 'what is it, a cat?' she replied 'no it's a carp' I said 'is it ready for netting' she replied 'yeah I was just waiting for you to get round!' I dipped the dry net in to the water and sunk it to get some perspective on the fish and she drew it up to kiss the spreading block at which point I lifted and pulled to the bank. At this point I hadn't looked in to the net but knowing there were a fair few mid to high twenties fully expected it to be one of these fish. I took the handle out and rolled down the arms to lift the fish on to the mat but was unable to pull the fish over the lip of the margin. Hmmmm I thought and redoubled my effort with two hands whilst grunting 'bloody hell Ali, you've got a cracker here!' I dumped the net on the mat and opened the folds to be greeted by the largest bellied highest shouldered fish I'd seen - 'my God, this has to be a 40' I said breathlessly. We slipped the carp out of the net and on to the weigh sling both marveling at the sheer size of her. I zeroed the Reubens and weighed the fish at 51lb 2oz, strained pictures were taken with adrenalin still coursing through our bodies and she was slipped back in to the murky lake none the worse for her experience. With shaking hands I weighed the sling coming in at 2lb 8oz exactly meant her first fish weighed in at 48lb 10oz.

After this several hugs followed and I found out that because I'd taken the bait round to my swim she was left with half a can of sweet corn and some sweets she had in her pockets to keep the children quiet on the flight over and had used half a liquorice allsort as hook bait and fed the swim with corn!! I was slightly disbelieving until I saw the liquorice still on the hook! Both the children are hoping that we can now get some kind of bait sponsorship with Bassetts but I've told them no to hold their breath ☺

With the second day out the way and some study on the catch reports over the last 4 years we found this to be a new lake record and she'd done it in just over half an hour on a kiddies sweet! The third morning I went back down with renewed anticipation and following a second trip to the supermarket I'd stocked up on several more bags of allsorts! so impatiently trying to get Lincoln asleep I watched the lake from the drive and saw plenty of fish feeding all over the lake, again interrupted by the aggressive swirls of catfish attacking small shoals of fish. Eventually he drifted off and I crept in to position, this time hair rigging several allsorts on one rod, sticking to Carp Food on my second and float fishing the kids sweets, we'd justified to our ourselves that as the lake experienced a lot of pressure 35 weeks a year then something different might be the way forward – and I got to eat some of my bait too!. The morning passed way too quickly again and before I knew it the little lad was awake and wanting to crawl so the rods were brought in and left for the day and we spent the afternoon splashing around in the not-so-warm swimming pool.

The fourth morning I awoke as usual at 5:30 with the little ones full of life and ready for days activities, the day turned out to be overcast and damp with a warm southerly breeze snatching the leaves from the huge oaks and sweet chestnut trees that surround the property and scattering them across the lake. I headed down around 8 am with Lincoln who'd fallen fast asleep in the pram within seconds of putting him in.

I was starting to get slightly concerned about my fishing ability as I effectively only had one more day to fish before we flew home so wanted to spend more time on the water, my wife said I could take as much time as I wanted and she'd shout me if she got swamped by the kids (what a lady!) Having read through the entire 4 years worth of reports the previous evening the general consensus seemed to turn up two spots that carp frequently visited so I decided to concentrate on these known areas – I'd baited 5k of pellets and a kilo of boilies the night before and both spots were Jacuzzi like on the still water. I changed leads to 1oz and quietly introduced the first rod, 2 bow waves and an explosion of water later and I quietly cursed my efforts, how could I have been so stupid to think that introducing a lead in to 3ft of water on top of feeding carp would have any other effect than for them to bolt. I threw my rod on to the reeds in disgust and sat down on my upturned bucket and began licking my wounds.

After giving myself a mental slapping I felt a little better so decided to put my first rod back out in the hope that the fish would return later, this was a good 20 yards from where I was sitting so it would keep this end of the lake undisturbed. Rather than get my second lead out I decided to cast the float rod past the second spot and slowly pull it back to the feeding area without introducing any further bait therefore keeping disturbance to an absolute minimum. This worked in principal and plenty of bubbling and line bites followed with the float dipping and bobbing every few minutes. So with the heart rate back up to 160 and having not blinked for about half an hour in a semi crouched position in the reeds, eyes firmly fixed on the float and imagining what was going on down there....Linc awoke and started burbling to himself. A couple of choice words later and I'd pulled the float in, backed away from the margins and began pushing Linc up the steep slope towards the house where I met Ali on her way down with Charlotte holding a very welcome brew. We went back down to the lake and I abandoned the idea of float fishing as there was far too much disturbance so bagged up the second unused rod and cast it to the far margins.

It was clear the kids were in a playful mood so I took them both up the garden to collect sweet chestnuts and play on the grass and Ali got the float rod back out. About half an hour later I'd just got back to the house and changed nappies when I heard my wife shouting me so I picked up both kids, one under each arm, yelled 'coming' and set off down the garden commando style with both children laughing and giggling, I unceremoniously dumped them next to the chair and retrieved the landing net, Ali mentioned that it looked like a small carp so with great care I slipped the net under a good looking common. Again I took the handle off, rolled the net down and delivered another heavy carp to the mat, the barbless hook had fallen out so the hook was located and moved aside and the net unfolded. A stunning looking light common gawped back at me that had the girth of a body builder!

The Reubens were zero'd with the sling and the carp weighed in at 35lb 13oz. It went ballistic once banked hence Ali's grip on the fish and Charlotte started crying because the carp was flipping her mum round the face with it's paddle! It had picked up my bait in the margins and obviously had returned to feed on the prebaited area. I was made up for my wife who's previous PB common was 33lb 12oz and I was left with the mess and the slime as my wife embarrassed for me whisked the kids off up to the house.

In some respects I was happy that the fish were feeding and catchable but stunned that having spent a total of 3 hours on the lake, Ali had caught the lake record and the second largest common! I fished on for another couple of hours stalking along the far side but whilst there was passing interest in my sweetcorn or mussel baits, nothing definitive came that day. After getting the children down early we both headed back down to the lake for the final hour before dark, we saw a few catfish hunting and a huge mirror slapped itself down in the far corner a couple of times but other than that nothing materialized to any of the rods.

The fifth and final day followed a similar pattern to the others, I dumped the remaining 8 or so kilo's of pellets in to the margins and float fished over them during the morning but the lake seemed unusually still and devoid of life. I pulled the rods out and left them against a tree as several coypu were present in the lake and had nibbled my landing net the previous evening so everything was stashed in the trees when I wasn't fishing. I managed a couple of hours stalking on the far side of the lake in the afternoon and again the fish were present but nothing I could hit. I went back up to the house slightly dejected as I really wanted to catch a French fish and take my total up to 5 countries having taken carp from, but it appeared this probably wasn't to be. Before I headed off I dumped the remainder of a 5 gallon tub of sweetcorn in to the margins in front of Ali's swim. Evening came around and this was the last time we'd both get to fish so I told Ali I baited her swim and we both crept down to the lake with a bottle of wine.

I'd converted one of the other rods to float and didn't bother with the third, the kind of fishing we were doing this week I'd figured the less lead disturbance in the lake the better as we weren't able to fish extended periods. We both sat quietly chatting watching our floats in to dusk, a few minutes before we completely lost sight of them Ali's float took an assisted dive and she quickly struck in to something, somehow she'd managed to get a loop of line between the reel and the first eye wrapped around one of the chair legs but kudos to her, she switched the bait runner on, lifted the chair leg free, disengaged and still managed to keep the line tight to the fish. Once again I got the net in the water and slipped it under the fish and on to the mat. I could tell this was another corker having gotten used to netting big fish for my wife all week!! In almost complete darkness another fat mirror lay on the mat and Ali struggled to lift her for the shot, we struggled with the camera so couldn't get a decent shot of her (best one attached 9) however she went 44lb 6oz on the scales and further investigation was found to be the 2nd largest carp in the lake!

So in a total of about 4 hours fishing (to my 24 hours) my wife had managed 3 PB's, one of which was a lake record caught on a kids sweet, and the 2 largest carp in the lake, phenomenal angling by anyone's standards! Unfortunately I left without a fish but was still absolutely delighted for my fishing buddy and wife. Needless to say we've booked for 2010 when hopefully my little lad will be big enough to tackle some of the residents himself!