



Colin Davidson's CARP WORLD

Learn loads about the big carp scene by following our carp star, Colin Davidson, in his thought-provoking column. **THIS WEEK:** Davo shows how to catch on a cracking little day ticket water,

▶ **ONE** of the most handsome carp I've seen in ages – on a day ticket water too.



'Shoe little beauty!

LIKE many I'd back the Cotswold Water Park to be the absolute epicentre of big carp fishing in the UK in the next decade. If I had not a care in the world other than catching carp I'd move there tomorrow. With dozens of young, rich pits stocked with quality fish, and actively managed, it has the potential to be big carp central on the UK scene. Already producing 40s and with 30s galore, the future is as bright as it can be. Watermark Fisheries are one of the companies

who have invested heavily in the future of fishing on the Water Park, boasting 114-acre Bradley's in their portfolio, the biggest day ticket fishery in the UK. With so much water and 2,500 very fast growing carp it is already offering amazing sport. But over the road Watermark have another belting little fishery, pretty well the complete opposite to Bradley's. At just 4.5 acres but with 450 carp with a possible 40 and dozens of 30s Little Horseshoe offers intimate versus the colossal of Bradley's.

Having bagged one carp but lost a thumping fish on Bradley's on my only visit last year (a loss that still needles me...) Little Horseshoe offered the chances of a return match to try and make it honours even. Swotting up on the Watermark website gave me plenty to think about. Spooky on spods and heavy baiting, moody fish, a reputation for being a stubborn little venue but with some stunning carp as reward. Here's how my day on Little Horseshoe unfolded...



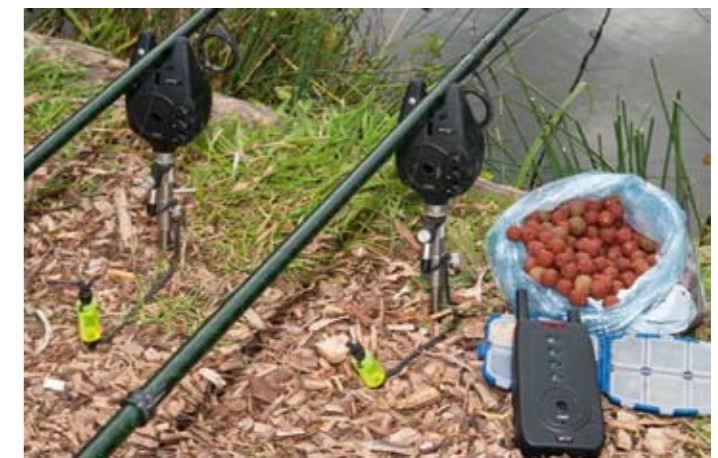
1 Arriving before dawn the first thing that strikes me is the beauty of the place and how well kept it is. Even better there's no-one else here. Taking half an hour to walk around the fishery helps get an idea of its layout and any major features and as the light lifts it also reveals a few carp rolling, and some bubbling halfway down the trout lake bank. One area in particular sees a few fish fizzing so that's the best starting point for my day session.



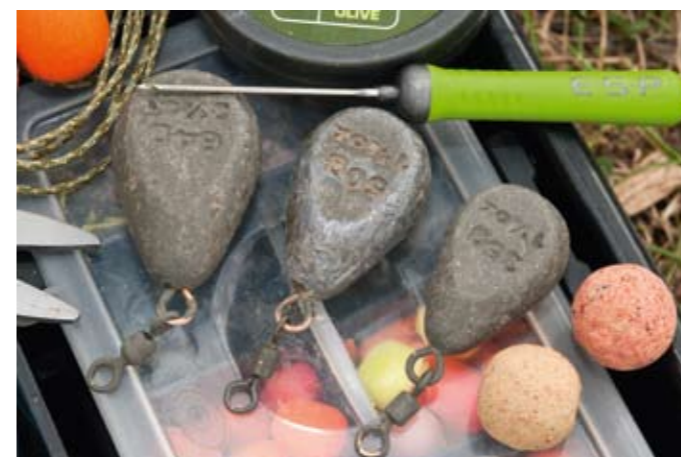
2 I'm starting with PVA bags of liquidised bread and crushed hemp. It's sufficiently different to the usual pellets and boilies that it often brings about a very enthusiastic feeding response. Two rods land on top of bubblers, and it's clear there's quite some depth of water, ten to 12 ft I'd guess. Although there's weed around the margins both leads are felt down to the bottom with a donk on the rod tip, leaving me happy with presentation.



3 Over the next half hour the fizzing continues in front of me but maybe a dozen fish roll further down the bank towards the corner. It's too many fish to ignore - the more fish you are in front of the better the chances of a take. The rods are wound in and walked a few swims down, then flipped out 20 yards in the middle of lots of fizzing. It's clearly feeding time first thing on here.



4 The next 40 minutes is frustrating, and despite the depth of water it's clear the rigs going in has really knocked them off the boil. There's been not a flicker of the light bobbins or a bleep from my posh new NTXr alarms. Only one more carp has rolled where before every few minutes they were at it. The more I watch the water the more convinced I am that the carp that were here have cleared off since my lines went out - didn't take long did it? Small water, pressurised carp for you...



5 I always work on gut feeling and with the carp having stopped playing in front of me but still fizzing back where I started I'm moving back to the first swim. It might seem illogical or daft to move about as much as I do sometimes but you can only work on what the lake is telling you. With the spiteful response to my usual 2 oz free running leads I've bitten the line and re-rigged with 1 oz leads to reduce the disturbance putting baits amongst feeding carp this time around.



6 At the business end there's a size 10 Arma Point SSC with a single grain of glow in the dark or white plastic corn. Buoyant, visual and small it's the perfect hook bait amongst crumbs of bread. It's rare I fish larger than a size 10 anywhere these days. The link is five inches of 15 lb Reflex braid. It can't tangle when threaded through cobweb mesh or stuffed inside solid bags. I like soft links partly because so few people use braid these days.



7 There has been one area where the bubbling has been phenomenal, fish really sheeting up and the line on the left rod fished amongst the activity has been twitching now and again as carp brush the fluorocarbon main line. Finally the bobbin smacks up to the butt then falls slack again. For a few seconds nothing happens then the bobbin picks up again and the tip pulls round. A swift strike and we're in to our first Little Horseshoe carp. He definitely didn't know he was hooked then... another advantage of very light leads.

10 On the Fox digitals it goes 29 lb 3 oz, and one of the most handsome carp I've seen for ages. Give it a few months of good eating and he'll be a 30-pounder for sure. There are odd bits of bait left behind in the sling, looking like hemp. I wonder if the carp I dropped on to have been clearing up someone's spod mix who was here recently. The bailiff Paul tells me no-one fished Little Horseshoe yesterday though, which is a reminder that sometimes carp can take several days to really get on a large baited area - which might well be after you've gone home.



13 The wind has got warmer and stronger since I arrived so I've shifted my tackle to the windward corner, freshening up my margin spot on the way. Despite a couple of fish rolling there's not a sound from the alarms. Across the lake a couple of hundred yards away I spy a very substantial fish roll over my margin spot, but before I can pack up and get over there a couple more anglers arrive and plot up in the swims next door and start whizzing bait boats around... Should have dropped in sooner - knickers!



8 As the carp bolts away from where the bait was positioned there are several huge plumes of bubbles where other nearby carp vacate the swim - there were certainly a few about. It feels like a small fish, coming high in the water quickly with small shakes of its head and turning on a sixpence. But playing fish on light leads is a different experience with no huge bomb to slow them down, and as it pops up to the net it's clear I've underestimated this one.



12 It's gone quiet following the disturbance of landing a fish. I baited a useful looking margin spot when I arrived, dropping hemp and rehydrated Atlantic Heat boilies in to give me an option for later. There's the odd bit of hemp oil being disturbed and a few pinprick bubbles but I'll leave it for a bit longer. The way the swims are laid out is great on Little Horseshoe with lots of space but that means lots of areas where carp can find refuge. I get the feeling these fish spend a lot of time creeping up and down the marginal shelf in plenty of out of the way areas, especially by day.



14 With the afternoon rapidly heading for evening there's just time to see if we can drop on fish somewhere else and sneak another chance. There's some bubbling in the shallow arm closest to the car park so a couple of bread bags are flicked out and the rods are propped on the reel handles and it's time to watch the lines for signs of life. There are some really inviting looking areas, with clean, steep marginal shelves dropping away from overhangs, reeds and lilies and on a warm summer day I reckon there would be some really exciting sport to be had.

9 It's a proper job, a nice chestnut brown mirror with a lot of scales towards the tail. I always leave a fish in the net for a few moments if the margins allow it to sit upright, giving me time to wet the mat and zero in the scales and weigh sling. Detaching the arms from the spreader block and lifting it out it's clear he's a 25-plus, possibly a bit more on top, and an absolute cracker into the bargain.



11 There's no fresh hook marks in this one, and it's incredibly full with a huge wrist to the tail and carrying as much weight as it can on its frame, really bursting at the seams. The little size 10 Arma Point is nice and solid though, the KD rig producing another very secure hook hold. Apart from the fact that it seems to catch them out so well this little presentation is excellent for pulling links back into bags and sticks, with no anchor shot to try and pull back through the PVA mesh because it's on the hair not the hook link itself.



15 Other than one pull which resulted in a strike into fresh air the lines have been resolutely still. It's a fascinating little place and one that has a reputation for being a bit tricky despite the head of fish. I've been spoiled coming and having such a cracking fish first visit and despite not managing any more chances I'm going home smelling of slime and remembering slipping back a nice fat mirror carp - which for a short day on a new water can't be bad. If they all look like this one did count me in for catching a few more please. A simply stunning little lake!



TICKET information

Tickets for Little Horseshoe are £25 for 24 hours, maximum three rods. Day tickets dawn until dusk are £15. Tickets are in advance from the nearby Tackle Den on Spine Road, South Cerney. Tel: 01285 862716. Or contact Watermark Fisheries through the website www.watermarkfisheries.com Fishing is from designated swims, particles must be prepared correctly.

DAVO'S WEEK AHEAD

“I'm looking around for a venue with good disabled access and plenty of fish to be caught - ideas?”