



CHERRY IS THE ICING ON THE CARP CAKE!

Spa-style luxury is the aim of this Cotswolds angling gem – and the fishing is out of this world, as I was about to discover for myself...

TODAY I'm perched on decking overlooking the beautiful Cherry Lake on the Cotswold Water Park, and the smell of sizzling breakfast bacon and freshly brewed coffee is only adding to the feeling that I've won the lottery. I'm here as a guest of Judith and Mike Kirsch, who have created an amazing fishery near the village of South

Cerney, in Gloucestershire. Cherry, the largest of four lakes on the Cherry Lakes complex, underwent a major restoration project starting in 2012. This involved de-silting, landscaping, and the construction of lodges to give guests – me included – a real five-star angling experience. I'm sad to be leaving soon. Just one more bite from the incredible stock of carp,

including 70 over 30lb, 12 over 40lb and a 51-pounder (all in only five acres of water) would be most welcome. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's backtrack to when I arrived here. Most of my fishing is on wild venues, but there's nothing wrong with a busman's holiday and a bit of luxury.

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My room with a view – of a lake full of big carp!



Cherry Lakes is an incredibly well kept and run venue.

The dream often sold by the carp fishing industry is one of a limited stock, a long campaign and bites at a premium, but for most anglers this translates into a nightmare run of endless blanks. I can fully understand

why someone with only limited time wouldn't want to waste their precious holiday like this.

As soon as the gates of Cherry Lakes opened I knew this fishery would be special – a beautifully maintained

series of pits, including Cherry Lake, where I was fishing, along with Cherry Mere, Springs and Pool, all available for exclusive use.

Judith and Mike were away, but managers Simon and Dave were there to greet me.

They put me at ease, and I immediately began to unwind. I was staying in Heron Lodge, one of three on the specimen lake. The trip was about the whole experience, not just the fishing, and my accommodation didn't disappoint, offering me the best 'bivvy' in the world!

Unpacking could wait as I listened to Simon describing a feature-packed swim with a

lakebed resembling an egg box. All bait was provided, including boilies, hemp and pellets, and now it was up to me to put them to good use.

Shielded by trees to my left and right, with no chance of someone setting up opposite me, I liked the privacy – if a carp were to make a fool of me, which one did on the first night, nobody would know.

I often take a while to adjust to a water and, in this case, I needed to brush up on the use of a bait boat, which only gets an outing a couple of times a year. Not having fished for carp for a few months, it was all too easy to get drawn into all the hype. My new super-rig

and too much bait resulted in a blank but, with bites coming mainly during the day, I didn't do too much damage and soon made some changes.

My tackle consisted of 3.5lb test curve rods and reels loaded with 15lb line, with tubing (a fishery rule) threaded on at the business

end. Safety clips carried flat 4oz leads to maximise the bolt effect, and hooklengths were 0.40mm fluorocarbon.

I reverted to my tried and trusted size 6 barbless Claw D-rigs, questioning myself why I ever changed them! Keep it simple, stupid!

Bait would be a wafter, but rather than leave it round, I trimmed the sides off to make it look different and perhaps less dangerous to the carp.

I don't like critically-balanced wafers, as I think they wave about too much. All I want is enough buoyancy so that the bait sits over and disguises the hook.

Back to basics, I felt happier as I introduced a handful of hemp and six crushed boilies – not the hopper load of bait that would be so tempting to pile in.



Big flat leads and backleads were the order of the day.

The boilies and hemp were provided. I trimmed down my hookbaits.



There are some lovely mirrors present too.

I cast my rigs to a new spot on the far-bank margin where a fish had regularly shown. And, sure enough, three bites in three drops of the bait boat resulted in two ghosties and a beautiful mirror carp.

I could sleep well that night, especially as I wouldn't have the rods out.

Crazy, some might think, but the experience offered by Cherry is more than just carp and, with heavy rain forecast overnight, I didn't fancy a soaking. This was my holiday, after all, and I wanted to enjoy the luxury.

Given the puddles I found at five the next morning I knew I'd made the right choice so, wide awake, I reset the rods close in, where I'd seen plenty of bubbling. Casting around the previous day, I'd found some lovely golden clay, and

here I dropped a rig that four hours later signalled a tentative bite as a clever carp shook its head in frustration.

I didn't wait for a screamer – instead I wound down and made contact. Immediately I knew this was the carp I had come for and, after some heavy lunges, a big golden common hit the surface, to be netted by Dave. A lovely fish of 38lb 4oz, and more than enough to make any holiday!

Back to the present, and I'm sitting here hoping for a repeat in my final hour. Most importantly, I feel refreshed and relaxed. If you want to enjoy the carp angler's equivalent of a spa retreat, then Cherry Lakes might be just what you're looking for.

● All details can be found at www.cherrylakes.co.uk or by calling 01285 869887.



Dave was on hand with the net when the big common tore off.

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