

Words & Pictures: **Richard Stewart**



IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

ACF heads out to the Eden's Lakes complex, in France, in search of some big French carp. How does the 'holiday' work out?

When ACF editor James Harrison told me: "You're going to France later this month," he wasn't going to get much of an argument from me! I was to be accompanied by colleague Dean Rothery, whose last ACF tour of duty had seen him bag his first French carp and first thirty. We rolled out of Dean's road in Northamptonshire in the early hours of the morning and headed off for Eden's Lakes in central France. As Dean pointed his Renault

Francewards, we were oblivious to the torturous journey that we were about to endure from Calais.

We were booked on the 6am ferry crossing from Dover and the first leg of our journey passed without incident. This was my first fishing trip to France, other than family-holiday dabbling. I'm much more at home on England's gravel pits and wasn't sure what I could reasonably expect from my first Gallic carp fishing experience. The crossing was

smoothed by periods of snoozing and soon we were speeding down France's clear motorways.

The first sign of things to come was apparent as we neared Paris, a quarter of the way into our trip. Like any capital city Paris attracts traffic chaos and we weren't going to be spared. We crawled around the bypass system taking in the 'creative' driving skills exhibited by the Parisians!

By the time that we'd shaken off the traffic



jams we were a couple of hours behind schedule. However, it wasn't long before we were pulling into the services immediately before our turn-off. We recharged with a couple of coffees and headed off the motorway through a toll booth. It was at this point that Dean realised that he'd lost his wallet. He'd managed to drive off leaving it on his roof. Cue mass panic.

We were 500km into France, with four nights in front of us, and Dean had no credit cards – not to mention the £300 cash that his wallet contained. We headed back to the services and asked in the main building, no luck. Dean was in pieces! With a huge stroke of fortune I located said wallet on the hard shoulder of the motorway – cue celebration! All we needed now was to get back onto the motorway and head back to the toll. Simple? Don't you believe it! We

could see the slip road, we could walk to it... but we couldn't drive to it. It seems that in France, once you are going in one direction you can't turn around until the next toll, which was 50km back towards Paris.

As you can imagine, we were grateful to finally find ourselves winding through the French countryside nearing our destination, the small town of Saint-Pierre-le-Bost. With a bit of help from the locals and some pidgin French from myself, we found Eden's Lakes; our home for the next four nights. Based around a rustic farmhouse in beautiful, pastoral surroundings, Eden's Lakes was a sight for our travel-weary eyes. We were to fish the North Lake, one of two lakes recently opened for carp fishing. This triangular lake is roughly five acres, with grassy banks and reed-fringed margins. As an old fish-farm lake, the bed is mainly clay,

with occasional harder gravelly patches and snags. It had fished really well since opening in March, but the scorching conditions and the report from the other two guys that we were to share the lake with, made me think that the going would not be easy. The lake is well stocked, with many of the fish yet to even see a hook. The biggest fish, a mirror of 51lb, is among those yet to hit the bank. This monster mirror is backed up by eight forties and around 15 thirties.

Despite the tough-looking conditions I managed a take within 45 minutes of setting up. I had noted a carpy-looking inflow pipe which, in the hot conditions, I felt might attract fish in. I had swung my bait out into the slight flow and it clonked down on broken ground in about 18 inches of water. The depth was a shock, all the area to my left was shallow, I struggled to find anything over

two feet. As we're talking about big, deep, French carp here I had my doubts as to whether they would feel comfortable feeding in just over a foot of water! I decided that because the spot looked so good, I would leave it there while I set up my home. If nothing else, the area looked good for crayfish and I wanted to know how active they were. I was surprised when the inflow rod blasted away, and gutted when I was cut off almost immediately. Slack lines pinned to the bottom with leadcore and a flying back lead always give me confidence, but this time it looked like it might have cost me a fish. I was sure that the line, which had cut above the leadcore, had severed on a rock near the inflow.

I didn't have time to dwell on that loss before my middle rod was away! The Eden's Lakes fish really do scrap, and this one was no exception. When it popped to the surface I saw that it was tangled in my line. My first French carp, a low double, was also my second in a way. Having cut me off, it had become tangled in my middle line and I had bagged him! I made the decision there and then that I would be beefing up my end tackle. I added 10 feet of snag-leader above my leadcore and resorted to tying my leads on. I didn't want to risk the lead becoming caught in the rocky bottom. I completed the set-up with 25lb Stealth Skin and a barbless size 4 Korda Wide Gape.

While all this was going on Dean had set up home, opting for the narrower, but much deeper, reed-fringed end of the lake. We had already seen a few chunks wallop out close in around there and Dean had spread his rods from the margins out into the deeper central channel. We both agreed that we'd be taking it easy in terms of baiting on this, the first night. We opted for PVA bags, very much 'English-style' fishing. My second French fish came to my middle rod fished out into open water, towards an area in which smaller fish had been active. The take



IN EDEN'S LAKES, ADAM AND LISA ARE CREATING A WORTHY ADDITION TO THE FRENCH HOLIDAY SCENE.

came at 1.45am and the fight was as vigorous as the first. Down to my stupidity, you won't find a picture of this fish! I covered the fish with the net on the mat while I sorted out my scales. I heard a rustle

and then a plop as the publicity-shy fish wriggled off the mat, which was positioned right next to the water, and slid over a foot or so of grass into the drink. I estimated that the fish was around 20lb, and I'd have loved to have taken its photo!

Dean wasn't far behind in getting among the fish. At 3am he was away on a rod fished on the side of a deep, central gully and baited with 1kg of chopped baits and pellets. The plodding resistance suggested that Dean had hooked our first substantial Eden's Lake carp. At 25lb it was certainly very welcome. The quick action had all come to Dynamite Baits Spicy Shrimp and Prawn liquid; they seemed to like it a lot! It is well worth noting that owner Adam Spiers has had two baits specially formulated for his fishery by The Carp Store, back in the UK. The Forbidden Fruits and Omega baits already have a good track record at Eden's and can be purchased from Adam.

Around an hour later a screamer on the inflow rod woke me. The shallow water erupted and fry scattered as the fish made its bid for freedom. Following a typically fraught scrap I netted a long, lean, mid-double common that more than once during the fight had me thinking that I had hooked one of the two cats in the lake! I looked down the bank and noticed that Dean was also locked in a one-sided battle with one of the lake's smallest carp, an original fish from the fish-farm days of about 3lb!

We were made to wait 12 hours before the next action. We'd sat out the day in scorching conditions, with bright blue skies and searing sunlight. As a former fish farm, Eden's still has fairly open banks, although ancient, oak-shaded meadows surround the slight depression in which the lake lies. By 4pm the heat had begun to



North Lake, home to whackers.



**They liked it spicy...
Spicy Shrimp and Prawn.**



**Tough gear for
tough carp, take
no chances!**

lessen and the carp came onto the feed. Once again the old faithful PVA bag proved its worth as another Eden's mirror made its way off with Dean's middle rod. The fighting quality of these fish defies belief. This one really put Dean through it, making unstoppable surges under the rod tip. Soon enough it succumbed and Dean was grinning from behind another French mid-twenty. The guys were sharing the lake with, expats Ad and Sy, were getting impressively consistent action. They had taken fish to 30lb plus and enjoyed particularly

**This one really put
Dean through it...**

frantic action on rods fished up onto the shallows. I had to wait until the dead of night once more before latching into my next carp. A bag of pellets and chops fished out into open water, in about three feet, absolutely melted off. The fight was an unusually dour affair and after a bit of plodding under the tip I netted my first French chunk. The fish went 25lb 8oz – I'd take some of that! It was a typical high-shouldered, pale, French carp. It had managed to wipe out my middle rod during the fight, so that one had to be rebagged and recast as well. I was fishing again by 3.30am.

One thing about France in July is that you never get to lie in; the sun is hot enough by 7.30am! As it was, Dean woke me, waving an absolute whacker under my nose. "I've got the big one we needed," he said, as I drowsily gathered my senses. At 37lb 10oz, he wasn't wrong. The great lump had fallen to the ever-consistent Spicy Shrimp, trout pellets and PVA combination placed in eight feet of water to the left of a tree-stump snag. We photographed the impressive specimen in the early morning sunlight before slipping her back... now for that forty. Eden's produced well throughout the hottest part of the day and at 11.45am I was summoned over to photograph a carp banked by Ad which, uncannily, also weighed in at 37lb 10oz!

While we had now managed eight fish between us, we still hadn't pinned down any cast-iron producing spots. A chat with Adam helped to make our minds up. These fish were 'bait fish', having been handfed all their lives. With this in mind we were going to settle upon a spot and apply a good quantity of bait.

Adam has placed bankside poles marking the position of two tree snags



lying along the bottom. Dean and I decided to get the boat out and locate one of these areas. The plan was to concentrate one rod each here for the rest of our stay. We eventually located one tree lying at an angle towards us, at about 40 yards. We placed markers at each end of the snag and scattered 5kg of chopped bait and pellets around the snag. The spot was rested for the remainder of the afternoon to give the fish a chance to get their heads down on the spots.

We were treated to a barbecue, courtesy of Adam, before retiring to our swims to recast. Dean and I had identified gravelly areas at each end of the snag to target. We despatched our bags out to these spots along with a top-up of bait. As the sun set, the area over the snag was alive with bubblebers and small fry dimpling the surface. As we sat watching the area, one of the markers bobbed as a carp rubbed against it – confidence was high.

I was awoken at 1am by Adam, who was fishing the night and had banked a good carp. The leathery lump went 29lb. I was left wondering what had happened out at the snag. Had we overdone it? I hadn't had a chance to properly wake up before my middle rod, fished with a



stringer, was away. As I lifted into the fish it ripped line from the spool – perhaps this was my biggie? I was never to know, the hook pulled as the fish rolled at about 40 yards. The run had come from an area 20 yards behind the snag, where we'd seen many fish rolling. I'd come to view the area

as an 'arena' of sorts – between Ad and Sy's markers and the snag area. I'd dotted baits around behind the main bed and placed my five-bait stringer to intercept browsing fish. I recast the stringer to the 'arena' and didn't have to wait long before the same rod was in action again. This time

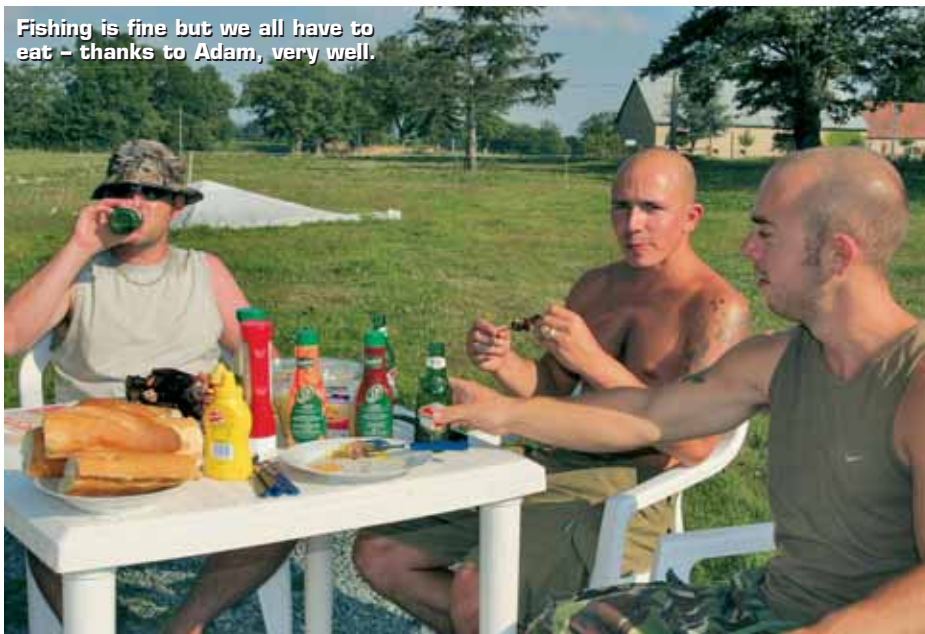
the fish stayed on and battled solidly. When it rolled in the edge it was clear that something was wrong. Once in the net we could see that the hook-hold was in the flank and upon checking the fish's mouth we could see that the hook-hold had cut, slipped out and taken hold in the flank. Disappointed, I returned the estimated twenty back without weighing or photographing it.

As the penultimate day wore on it seemed that our heavy baiting was to be vindicated. Dean enjoyed the best daytime action of the trip; banking five fish to 19lb with two coming off the back of the baited area, while I weighed in a 21lb mirror and lost another. By dawn on the final day we'd both had further action. Dean banked another twenty at 21lb 8oz and I netted a pristine, double-figure mirror. During the night Ad and Sy had added fish of 25lb and 30lb 12oz to their impressive total – having taken more than 40 fish between them.

For us the trip was over and we left Eden's Lakes with Adam about to welcome another four anglers. We'd arrived, three days ago, in anticipation and were leaving having banked good fish. In Eden's Lakes, Adam and Lisa are creating a worthy addition to the French-holiday scene. They also expect to have their other big-carp water, The Jolly Pad Lake, up and running soon. The facilities and layout of the venue lend themselves perfectly to social angling for large carp, without the mud, snags and graft involved with some of France's wild, big-fish waters.

Eden's Lakes will cater for the family man, right through to the group of mates looking for prolific, manageable water with the chance of a biggie. The brand-new chalet with shower, fridge-freezer and cooking facilities ensures that Eden's isn't your average drive and survive venue.

Check out www.edenslakes.com for booking information and further details.



Fishing is fine but we all have to eat – thanks to Adam, very well.



Sunrise at Eden's.