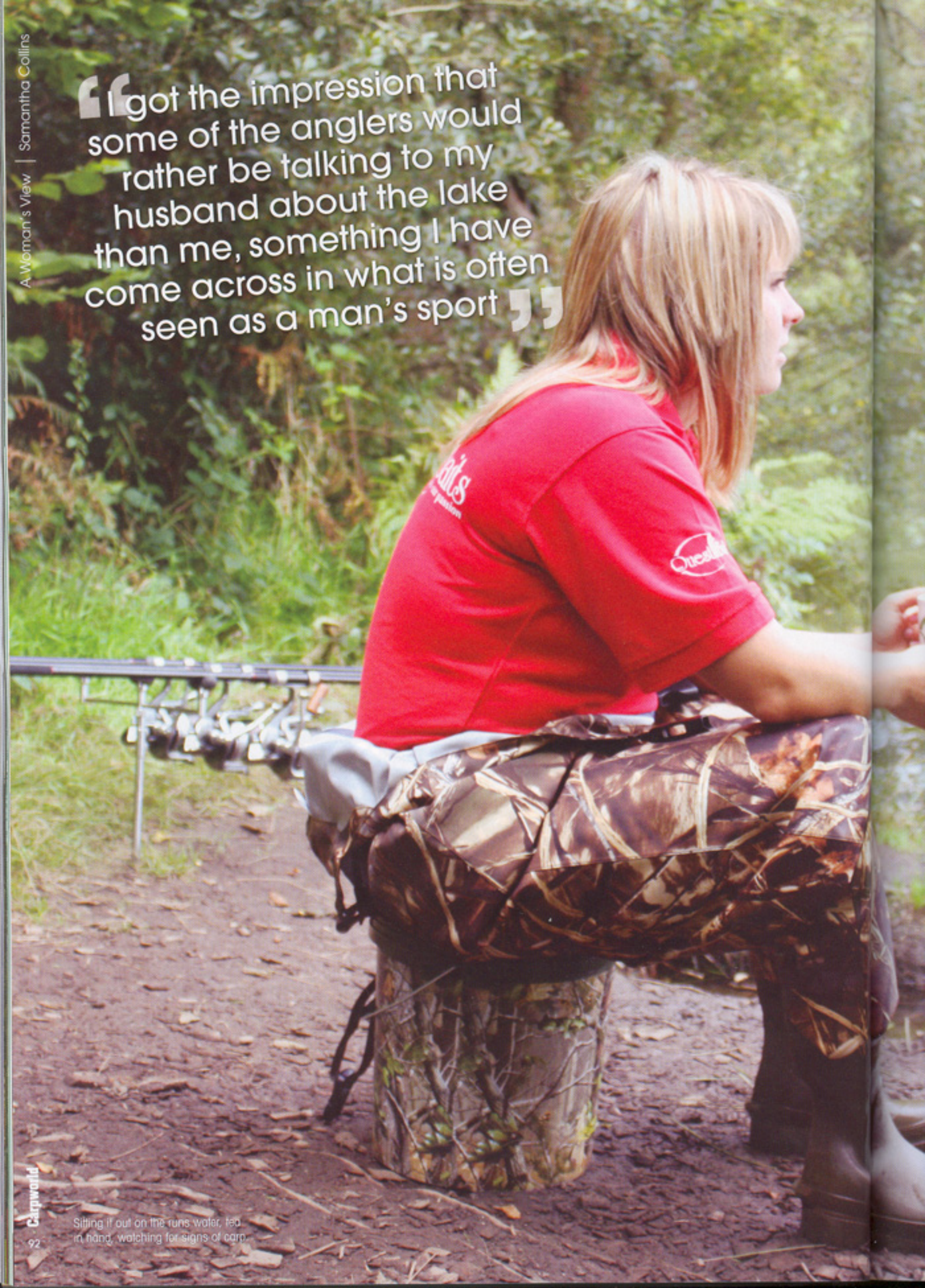


“I got the impression that some of the anglers would rather be talking to my husband about the lake than me, something I have come across in what is often seen as a man's sport.”



All too often carp fishing is looked upon as a man's sport. However, there are an increasing number of women who are swapping the dirty dishes for a weekend on the bank! One such lady angler to hit the headlines over the past few months is southwest-based **Samantha Collins**.

A WOMAN'S VIEW

Samantha Collins

Thinking back over the past six months, I have realised how far people (me included) are willing to go in search for carp. Having not fished for the majority of the 2007 winter season, except for the odd hard day on a syndicate water, I was looking forward to getting back into some regular carp fishing. Quest Baits in Nottingham agreed to take me on board as a consultant at the beginning of the year, so I made a New Year's resolution to find a local water and fish it as often as I could. I set off mid-January in search of just that, which proved to be easier said than done, especially when living in the south of Cornwall with few carp lakes around and a lot of travelling.

It took a lot of chatting with the locals and a fair bit of research before I decided to go and check out a lake I had previously written off, one that sits right on my doorstep, which I hadn't even thought about for a long time. For me there were a number of reasons not to fish this water, one of which was the size of it – just 1½ acres. Was that just a little bit too small? Maybe, maybe not. There was also the problem of the lack of knowledge of the stock in there. If I was going to fish this lake in my spare time then I was going to need some reassurance that there were indeed carp in there to be caught!

After finishing teaching one Friday afternoon, I decided to bite the bullet and do a day session on the water, at least then I could form my own opinion. So, at 5.00 a.m. on the Saturday morning I drove a short distance down the lanes and arrived at the lake with great expectations. After walking round most of the lake several times I was still none the wiser about the place. I decided to talk to the only other carp angler there and see what helpful advice he could give me. Let's just say he was a little taken aback by a woman poking her head round his bivvy door! But the conversation soon got flowing, and in amongst the odd joke about women fishing

and the lack of facilities to accommodate we ladies, he soon eased my worries and convinced me to give it a go.

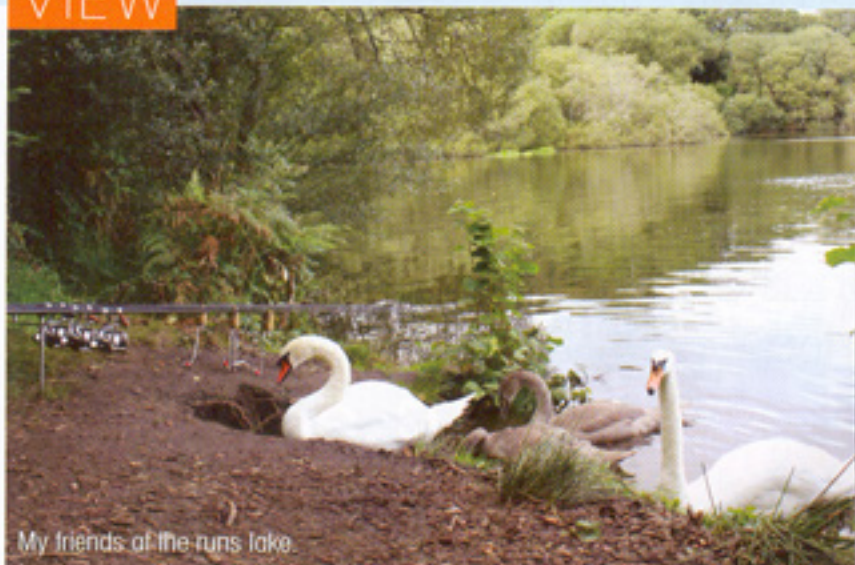
With a little encouragement I decided to set up in a swim towards the left of the lake, enabling me to reach the non-fishable far bank and the edge of the no fishing bay. I sat out the rest of the morning with two rods, both having single hookbaits, cast as near to the far bank as possible. This was not, by any definition, a successful morning and lessons were being learned – or so I kept telling myself. I pondered over my bacon butty and mug of tea and I had to rethink my plans for the afternoon.

I spent time mapping the lake bottom, which at some points was deeper than I had ever imagined, even for an old quarry, and I soon had a better picture of what was happening. It was all about finding gaps in the weedbeds and using them to my advantage. Having said that, I was still yet to have a run, but my fellow carp angler did manage to show me two carp on the bank early that evening, which, as can be imagined, sparked up the male versus female banter from earlier on in the day. I went home that evening not too upset about not catching but eager to return with a clearer picture of what to expect. I wanted to return the following day but it wasn't possible, so I had to wait another whole week.

From then on I returned to the lake most weekends, and slowly but surely got to know it pretty well. I was wrong to worry about the fish stock; by the number of captures (my own and those of other anglers) it soon became obvious that there was plenty for all in there, with the biggest reaching 21lb 4oz. I didn't catch the biggie but always hoped that the next run would be it! By the end of March, when I talked to anyone about this lake, I started to describe it as a runs water.

At this point I had an Easter break, which, as one of my many school holidays, ➤

A WOMAN'S VIEW



My friends at the runs lake.



The 70-acre gravel pit – mind-blowing for a lass like me!

enabled me to undertake a longer session of carp fishing. I decided to go to Laroussi in France in search of a large common. I had to think really hard to adapt my techniques to suit the situation because this lake seemed much bigger than others I had become used to. I had almost forgotten the effort needed to cast longer distances. Don't get me wrong though, I am certainly not complaining about the 44lb 12oz common I came away with.

I'd now got the bug to fish some different lakes back in England, so I travelled up to Shropshire and joined my husband on his syndicate water to fish for carp in the 30lb bracket. This is what can only be described as a hard-going water, but all was worth it when that screaming run was heard. I couldn't travel this far on my weekends off, not every week, so I made the decision to find a similar challenge nearer to home. It was a difficult decision to leave the comfort of the runs water for a while and go off in search (again) of a fairly local water, but this time there was more of a requirement for some larger, more challenging carp.

Without warning, the hook pulled and what felt like a whopper was gone – at least I'll never know what it was!

So, it was back to the drawing board again and I found myself in a similar situation to the one I'd faced back in January, this time the difference being that I was more focused and aware that I might have to travel that bit further in order to achieve what I was looking for. I extended my search to the whole of the southwest, and immediately one particular lake kept getting mentioned – a 70-acre gravel pit. How on earth had I missed this previously? No matter what, I had to go to check this out, and the quicker this could be done, the better.

I wasn't disappointed when I got there, it looked so inviting I wanted to get my rods out there and then, but I did manage to restrain myself. I opted to get a better feel of the lake by going for a wander around it, something

I almost regretted because it seemed never-ending, but it did give me the opportunity to talk to the other carp anglers there. Some of them were more forthcoming and friendlier than others, although I have to say I did get the impression that some would rather be talking to my husband about the lake, something I have come across a few times in what is often seen as a man's sport. It didn't put me off, though, and I quickly realised this was a lake that would take a lot of work, although the rewards would be unbeatable, especially with there being just over 100 carp in there.

The following week I went on a day session there and opted to fish one of the larger bays. During the morning I took some time to watch the water, attempting to locate any fish



Laroussi was a learning curve, but what a way to learn.



Out it goes.



Jon Porter spoke to the guys at RealTree and they kindly sent me some kit.



The 18lb common, there was no one around and I haven't learned self-take photography yet.

movement. There was very little to be seen, which left me confused as to whether I had chosen a good swim or not, so I went about locating some ideal spots to fish and I placed my rods on them. All I could do then was cross my fingers and wait in anticipation. Not long into the afternoon there was the beep I had been waiting for, and I had an amazing fight on my hands – you can only imagine what was going through my head. Then, without warning, the hook pulled and what felt like a whopper was gone – at least I'll never know what it was!

I cast back out to the same spot and hoped for that second chance, which, it has to be said, didn't materialise, although a thunderstorm did, which forced me to pack up early and head off home. I was gutted but I knew the opportunity was there, I just had to gain a good picture of the lake, but as we all know, this takes time. For one reason or another I couldn't get out to fish for a few weeks after that, and I started to long for carp on the bank.

I'm not ashamed to say that after my previous session it took me a while to summon the enthusiasm for fishing what seemed a massive lake again, especially when I knew of easier runs waters I could fish. I persevered and found myself sitting at the side of the lake watching the water and forcing myself to come up with a plan to fish harder and better. I couldn't stay away from the lake and found myself popping down after work to check out what was happening and to talk to the regular anglers about their catches and experiences.

On one of these occasions I came across

a two-day carp match, with bivvies in what seemed like every swim. What a sight on what is usually a fairly quiet lake, and it only confirmed that this was the lake to keep working at, even though there is a small ratio of carp to the scale of the water. It was a good boost to see others doing what I had been contemplating doing for the past month or so.

That Friday evening I loaded up ready for a weekend session and couldn't wait for what could be a great June weekend's fishing. I got there bright and early on Saturday morning, pulled up in the car park, and then went and stood at the edge of the lake. Where should I go? That was the question running through my head. I finally opted for a swim towards the middle of the lake, at least then I could pick three spots in completely different areas. The wind was pushing towards me and the conditions couldn't have been more perfect.

The first spot was to the left of me on the edge of the entrance to a small bay, the second was 50 yards in front of me, and the third was 10 yards from a weedbed towards the right of me. I was confident with the chosen areas and the bait that I had placed in there. I had mixed 10 chopped-up Liver B8 boilies and pellet in a PVA bag, and I felt like it couldn't go wrong.

At around 2 o'clock in the afternoon I saw bubbles come up from the right-hand spot

and eagerly sat and watched my rods – but nothing. By 8.00 p.m. I decided to rebait, so wound my rods in and cast new PVA bags to the same spots ready for the night. A quiet night followed but I knew there was another day to go. I had just rebaited for the morning when the sound of a screaming rod rang out. I hit into it, the fight wasn't as hard as before,

and this time I managed to land an 18lb common. Boy, was it a welcome fish – not the biggest in there but big in its own right – especially to me.

"Boy, was it a welcome fish – not the biggest in there but big in its own right – especially to me"

During that day the lucky chap in the swim next to me managed to land four fish in the space of five hours. I was happy to witness mirrors up to 27lb coming out of the lake, and they were immaculate carp. I didn't want to pack up and go that evening; I had obviously located some of the fish and knew they were around my swim, so I didn't leave till 10 o'clock that night.

It's now late in the year and I have spent the past month or so really mapping out the lake and understanding the patterns within it. The more often I have been there, the more I have got to know the other carp anglers and the more knowledge they have shared with me. I feel I have at last found the lake I began looking for way back in January, and I'm really enjoying the challenge. **SC**

I'm still out there, and even though they can't see me, I can see them.

