

Laroussi *and* Old Oaks

Read all about Shaun Harrison's eventful trip to two fantastic commercial venues in France.

I was in desperate need of a break. I wanted to relax and take in my surroundings in hopefully semi-bearable weather. So, for me there was no other choice than a quick skip across the Channel and into France.

Saturday evening, November 4th, saw me point my bonnet southwards down the M1 to an accompanying background firework display. I remember thinking at the time I really must send a thank you when I get back to the relevant counties I drove through that gave me such a nice send-off. I can't ever remember going on holiday before and anyone showing the slightest bit of interest. A spectacular send-off indeed!

With two weeks in front of me I had decided I would divide the fishing between three different lakes, starting at Pierre La Treiche in the east, then a 500km drive to Le Mans and the Angling Lines' waters, Laroussi and Old Oaks (which is practically across the road from Laroussi).

The Pierre La Treiche trip was to be a bit of a social trip. I was going to be sharing the lake with Pete Castle, Mark Hutchinson and Tim Paisley. Pete and Mark had been on the trip the previous year when I was fortunate enough to bank a gorgeous-looking mirror of 54.04. Not to be outdone, Pete banked a 58+ the following day!

This time, during the four days and five nights I fished La Treiche, I hooked 16 and landed 12. Finally I felt as though I was starting to get to grips with the place.

I had to leave before the others in order to be at Laroussi for a filming schedule (it was supposed to be a holiday!). I ended up being delayed longer than I had anticipated and after leaving the lake I set off on the 500km drive.

First Glance

My first sight of Laroussi came on the Saturday morning, 11th November and I must admit to being very pleasantly



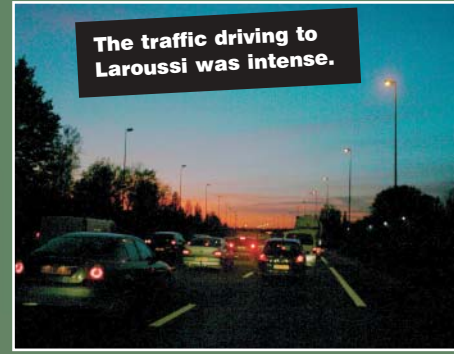
Before travelling to Laroussi, I managed this corker from Pierre La Treiche.



And this monster!



The traffic driving to Laroussi was intense.



surprised. It is a mature gravel pit, obviously very well maintained by Mehdi, the owner. It was immediately obvious that an angler looked after the fishery, rather than someone simply out to take money from anglers.

The previous week had seen a few frosts, as we had experienced in the UK. The lake had practically switched off with very few chances being had by anyone. This didn't particularly put me off. At least these carp had not been hammered.

Once everyone had arrived (five anglers this week), Mehdi gave us all a little pep talk and a guided tour of each swim, pointing out the various features worth exploring. It was all very useful stuff. Mehdi obviously knows his lake and his carp and he will do all he can to help you catch them.

After the tour of the lake, rather than draw for swims he left us to say if we had any particular preference in swim choice. Amazingly everyone had a rough idea where they wanted to be. The only clash was between Elie Godsi (who had driven over from England to join me for a few days during this second week away) and me. A quick toss of the coin sorted this one – I lost!

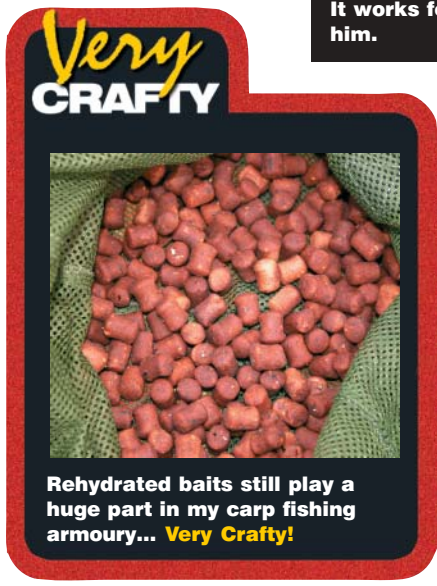
Both swims gave us a lot of water to go at, my swim also offered the option of casting to overhanging trees on the left-hand bank. I had the full week ahead of me, so I was a little reluctant to commit myself to a large baited area until I had studied the water for a day or so, in case there was an area the fish showed, an area they obviously preferred to be in.

So let us look at my first three bait position choices. The margin is the biggest feature on any lake. It is a massive bar, which rises out of the water. I had a careful feel around with a lead and found a small tabletop area, which felt a little cleaner than the lakebed surrounding it. I interpreted it as being clean stone, whereas a few feet either side, although there was still stone, felt as though there was a very light dust covering on it. Something had definitely been feeding on the tiny area I found.

The middle rod to catapult range towards the obvious mark is a method I have employed a lot over the years and it seems the busier the venue, the better the method is. My reasoning for this is that the carp will expect to find bait at standard catapult range.

Angling Lines' Laroussi & Old Oaks – Shaun Harrison

Sebastian's little mascot! It works for him.



Rehydrated baits still play a huge part in my carp fishing armoury... **Very Crafty!**



You can't complain with carp this size. Sebastian's first bite.



The facilities at Laroussi are exceptional. Perfect for a week's fishing in France.

If there is an obvious marker that others have probably used, then there you have it, a spot the carp expect to find food.

The third rod was placed at maximum range, and was simply used to explore other opportunities. If a carp had shown, then this single hookbait would have been wound back and dropped in the area of the show.

I am quite fortunate in being able to hold my own in the casting stakes. To this day it amazes me why so many carp fall to this long-range single hookbait method. After all, they rarely see free/safe baits out

Struggling at Laroussi, I couldn't help thinking about the fish I caught from La Treiche.



Far Margin Tricks

During the short time I had been in the swim there had been a number of carp showing right over on the far margin, which was over 200 yards away and out of bounds for fishing. Mehdi had made it clear from the start, though, that we could go and bait up from that side if we wished, so it would be possible to bait up easily at maximum casting ranges. At least I could get closer to the carp!

I nipped round to the far margin (with one of the lads watching over my rods) for a quick plumb around. Now, would you believe, my first cast tangled with my long-range rod and I was forced to wind it all the way into the far margin where I was now standing with the marker rod? Well, it seemed a shame to have to walk all the way back around to my swim just to wind it back and recast! So, I cut off the marker float, tied a loop in the end of the line and PVAd the hook of the fishing rod to it. This enabled me to accurately lower the rig, which was attached to my rod way back in the swim, to the spot where the fish had been showing, and feel the lead into place, keeping the hook off the bottom whilst the PVA melted. I just happened to have a load of chopped-up boilies in my

pocket (as you do), so a nice sprinkling around the area set a trap – perfect! An accident or a plan? What do you think? Very Crafty!

I then had a plumb around with the marker gear, and found a nice sandy spot. Back in the swim the marker looked a long way over but I felt I could reach it. I had an audience at the time, and I'm not kidding you, if there had been an extra coat of paint on my marker float I would have chipped it! Honestly, I couldn't believe how close I had dropped it at such range!

After going back round to the far margin to spod the marked area, I eventually managed to crash out in my chair. Less than an hour from placing the tangled rig in the far margin I received a dropback. Here we go, I thought. I wound and wound before realising a coot had taken my bait! Mehdi told me the French word for coot. They pronounce it 'fook'. Yes, quite apt really!

I decided not to go through the rigmarole of casting back out then tangling the rig from the other side. I had to find an area in the middle that I could bait up from my swim and to which I could recast easily. The marker rod was back in my hands and I really did thrash my swim to a foam. I couldn't find anything that really interested me. If I'd had only a day to fish I wouldn't have done it, but I had been there 24hrs and little had shown in my comfort zones. It was Sunday and I had until the following weekend for everything to settle down again. I reasoned that making lots of disturbance today would be better than little bits of disturbance all through the week.

I took quite a bit of ribbing from the other lads. They were enjoying a bit of a social whilst I kept thrashing away with the marker. I can't explain it, but some areas feel so much better than others despite appearing to be the same depth. Suddenly, when I was just about resigning myself to fish one of my 'interesting' finds, I found the spot.

It was a very subtle difference, but the first thing I found was that I had more difficulty feeling the bottom. The lead skipped back much easier. All the surrounding area had been a bit of a drag on the rod tip. Suddenly it was cleaner. The top layer of light dust had gone. This had definitely been fed upon. A good area to take a look at.



The first swim at Laroussi.

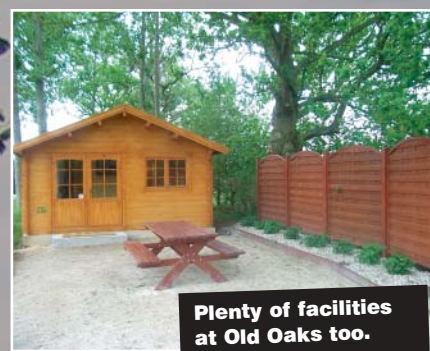
Angling Lines' Laroussi & Old Oaks – Shaun Harrison



The best part of the whole trip was that it was all captured on film.



The Old Oaks carp were stunners.



Plenty of facilities at Old Oaks too.

I popped up the float and spodded the area with Hot Hemp and my own Quest Baits' Special Crab Plus boilies in three sizes, chopped and whole. Things looked good.

No sooner had my head hit the pillow than a carp found the bait over the newly found area. The rod was bucking over in my hands and it was definitely a carp. Laroussi also holds some large catfish and massive brown sturgeon. Judging by the fight though, this was definitely a carp. But it fooled me – it felt massive. So much so I back-stepped to my umbrella, picked up the walkie-talkie and called Elie.

"Are you awake?" I asked (bloody stupid question).

"Er, yes. Are you alright?" came the obvious confused answer.

"I've just hooked a lump," I said.

"I'll be right there."

Seconds later, Elie stood by my side as the carp chugged around. I really did think this was going to be one of the massive carp that Laroussi holds. Eventually it was circling under the rod tip, and, once on the surface, Elie netted it without fuss. I couldn't wait to get a glimpse. The torchlight showed a large flank but thin shoulders – a young fish on the way up. The scales said 34lb 4oz. Had I lost it I would have sworn it was a much larger fish, but don't get me wrong, I was still chuffed to bits.

I wish I lived closer to Laroussi because I would be there as much as possible. There are massive carp swimming around in these quiet surroundings and you couldn't wish to meet a nicer person than Mehdi. Always smiling, always very helpful.

The facilities at Laroussi are superb. Mehdi lives on the banks in a wooden chalet, and the toilet and shower blocks are built in the same way. They are very



A consolation prize for me.

clean and split into three main rooms, giving ample space for the sinks, shower, toilet, fridge, freezer, power sockets for telephone, camera battery charging, etc. – everything you need when a long way from home. There is also room, and it is perfectly safe enough, for hanging out clothes to dry.

Camera Disaster!

Later in the week, after being in a bit of a quandary with my tactics, I got the 2.00 a.m. wake-up call. Bleep. Bleep, bleep, bleeooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo... I was holding a bent rod, one of the long-range rods that had a Fruity Trifle pop-up and a carp on the end. Whilst out at range I again picked up the walkie-talkie and woke Elie. I needed him to be aware in case the carp kited to the right through his lines. After much pumping the carp was in the edge and promptly netted. This fish was a fair bit larger than the 34.

I carried the carp ashore and pulled the mesh back from the flanks of a deep-bodied mirror. The scales said 45lb 6oz. A few stills and the carp was returned. Another Quest Baits' Fruity Trifle pop-up (shotted down to the eye) was soon flying through the night air to land with a distant thud on the surface of the water. Torchlight revealed the marker knot to be in the right place as I settled back onto my bed, most content with the capture. I think there had only been one other carp caught at this stage, this being a 20lb+ common from the top bay. So, although Laroussi wasn't exactly switched on, I was quite content with the action I'd had. I picked up the EOS digital to have a look at my pictures. As soon as I saw the first one a cold shiver went down my spine. It was vastly out of focus. I looked at the next one – the same. I couldn't look at the others. In my game every photograph is important to me. I had just put a 46lb 6oz carp back without having any useable pictures. I really was gutted!

I couldn't understand what had happened. Elie uses a similar camera to mine for his own photography. It wasn't until three heads got together on the case that we reached the conclusion that it was my fault for leaving the camera on manual focus rather than auto focus. The previous pictures I had taken had been scenic shots and I very much prefer to focus these myself. I really should have taken a look at the pictures before I returned the carp, but the fish's welfare came first.

Just as I was getting ready to leave the lake to have a few hours away, one of the long-range Fruity Trifle rods again burst into life. I hooked a heavy fish but it came free around a minute after I connected with it. I wasn't receiving enough action to afford to lose carp, but the excessive range at which I was fishing, and the tiny barbless hooks I was using weren't exactly conducive to landing everything hooked. I didn't bother recasting. I wanted to look at the nearby town of Le Mans and check out the tackle shop and sample some food from a local restaurant as well as do a supermarket run. It's always good to have a break.

Old Oaks

Thursday morning dawned cloudy with the threat of rain. Elie was packed before it started, but start it did. All week I had wanted to get in his swim and I wasn't going to let a bit of rain put me off. As soon as his key went into the ignition my umbrella was down. I covered up everything with a spare groundsheet whilst I set up my new home in my new plot. I returned to find the groundsheet had blown off and everything was wet anyway. Once everything was installed I gathered the essentials together, as Mehdi had invited me to have a go with him on his other water, Old Oaks. It was pouring with rain constantly, but what incredible sport lay in wait.

I had a walk around Old Oaks before Mehdi arrived and spotted a couple of fish both to the left and to the right of the second-to-last swim. This seemed an ideal choice for a bit of a social. There was room for us to fish two rods each from either side of the swim.

I had started to rehydrate some air-dried baits a couple of days before, specially for this short afternoon session. I had rehydrated them in my ever-faithful hemp juice. One batch was Quest Baits' Rahja Spice and the other was Special Crab Plus. I had purposely over-hydrated them so they looked and felt like pre-formed unboiled paste baits. The attraction oozing from these had to be seen to be believed.

Mehdi had just put in his first rod as I completed my second one, and was almost instantly into a fish before he had even had the chance to fire in any free baits. It had fallen to one of my rehydrated Crab Plus boilies with a small artificial sweetcorn stop above it. Mehdi had

claimed to have no bait so he would need to use mine. Strange that, as he sells Quest Baits at the lake!? I guess he just wanted to try the rehydrates, which have been so successful for me over the years. The fish turned out to be the smallest we were to catch, at 23lb.

Mehdi recast and managed to get a second rod in before the first was away again. I remember thinking that I was going to be in for a stuffing here. The carp were getting progressively bigger too. Sport came thick and fast. It was unbelievable. Closer to December 1st than November 1st and the carp were feeding like crazy. In just five hours we caught nine good carp between us. Mehdi caught four and I caught five, but I was keen to get back to Laroussi before it turned dark and hopefully open my account in my new swim.

Old Oaks really does look an incredible venue. It has exactly the same facilities as Laroussi, which is situated across the road. Old Oaks is a much smaller water, ideally suited to anglers wanting to fish English-type methods at normal casting ranges. The fishing is from one bank only and the far margin is easily within casting distance. I wish I could have spent a little more time there but I left with such fond memories. A lovely water, full of obliging carp, and in such good company. How could I not have enjoyed myself?

Return To Laroussi

It was practically dark when I returned to Laroussi so I settled for three hookbaits at range for the first night. Again, I was up at first light, as keen as ever. It had continued to rain all night and I had been up and down with annoying phantom takes. They would slam the bobbins into the butt, pull the line from my clips, which I had set quite tight, and then take line off the spool. I would pick up the rod but nothing would be there. Everyone around the lake suffered the same. I think Mehdi goes for a swim at night for a laugh!

Then it happened.... a carp at maximum range found my right-hand rod, which was sporting a Special Crab Plus boilie with a bright yellow sight bob above it. I wound into it and the rod took on a most satisfying curve, and immediately line started to pull from the clutch. Straightaway I knew this was what I had come all this way for. All my effort, all my work, this was payback time. It took me an age to get the carp into my margin. Repeatedly it would go on 30yd, very slow, very powerful runs. The camera was rolling. Mehdi had walked right around from his house to view the action. Sebastian came along and the two English anglers on the point stood and watched.

I turned to the camera on several occasions and said I was playing the largest carp I have ever hooked. Mehdi whispered to Sebastian it was fighting like Carol, one of Laroussi's 60s. Every time the fish was close to the margin, bubbles would erupt on the surface and off it would go again. I couldn't believe the power in this fish. So slow, but oh so powerful, and the line just trickled away off the spool

despite me bending as hard as I dare with my 3½lb Hi S.

Eventually the carp was back in the edge and Mehdi strained over for a glimpse of it as it swam under the lines of my other rods. It boiled for the first time and I felt it stop when a little finger pressure was applied to the spool. This was getting close to the fish being beaten. It allowed itself to be pulled back under my rod tip. The top of the rig came into view then disappeared again into the depths as once again the monster took line from my clutch. The spool spun as it had so many times during the fight, the rods were bent, and I knew it was just a matter of time... CRACK!

The line parted and the rod sprang back. I couldn't believe what had just happened. One moment I was connected to the largest carp I have hooked to date, and the next it was gone. I can put up with hookpulls – they are all part of fine-tuning the rigs – but tackle failure! For me it is like a mechanic's car breaking down. I have spent 26 years in the tackle trade and reckon I know a bit about tackle. For a line to break on me really hurt; the fact that a fish of a lifetime was connected... well I can't even put it into words. All I can presume is that the massive amount of twist put into it during the long fight, with the constant line stripping against the clutch, simply got too much for it. It broke with a loud crack, so certainly didn't catch on anything and fray. The clutch was set lighter than it had been at the start of the fight and it had taken lots of line on that setting.

I checked the line and it broke easily. I was in a daze. I couldn't believe what had happened to me. Everyone was watching and it was all a formality. Life can be so very cruel at times.

I stripped all three rods and respooled with my well-liked and trusted Kevin Nash



Lesson learned. Don't leave your camera in manual focus mode when you've got a 40 in your hands!

Bullet. It doesn't cast as far as some but I know exactly where I stand with it. Bullet is as tough as old boots. Lesson learned.

The rest of my stay passed in a bit of a blur. I pulled out of another fish and ended with a bonus carp of 33lb before leaving for home.

Mehdi has two absolute gems on his hands with both Laroussi and Old Oaks.

Thanks to his sheer hard work and determination both are incredible venues. I have a massive score to settle at Laroussi and can't wait to get back!

Best fishes

*Team Crafty Carper
Shaun Harrison*

If you would like a crack at Old Oaks or Laroussi, give Angling Lines a call on 08712 004466, or visit their excellent website: www.anglinglines.com

A 34lb 4oz Laroussi mirror.

