

AND THE CLEAN, 'GLASSY SMOOTH' SILTY AREA (READ: THE TYPE OF SPOT YOU'D CLASS AS A PREVIOUS RENOWNED 'IT'S A BITE' TYPE SPOT) REMAINS UNTOUCHED. MORAL OF THIS STORY? NEVER BE PUT OFF BY REALLY, AND SHAUN HARRISON MEANS 'REALLY' SOFT SILT...

A BIG FLAT SPOT WITHIN A FEW HOURS OF BAITING UP A DEEP, THICK, CRAPPY SILTY AREA...

DEEP SILT FEEDERS

Although he's got 30 years of experience fishing thick, silty meres, a recent session has made Shaun Harrison question everything he thought he knew and did when it came to silt fishing...



SHAUN HARRISON



SHAUN HARRISON

I

lay there in bed in that lovely halfway, totally relaxed stage between sleep and being awake. That comforting in-between world I never usually get to

experience for long. I was comfortable, very comfortable. I glanced at my watch and then suddenly jolted to life, we had a ferry to catch and were supposed to be already on the road!

I had stayed over at Ron Key's house. Ron is my usual overseas travelling partner and after many trips to various parts of the world with our carp gear we have learnt that it is far more sensible to get the bulk loaded the night

before, ready for a quick getaway the next day. I walked down the corridor and shouted through his door...

"Ron, it's 6.15."
"What? Oh S***!"

It was panic stations but within minutes we were in his Jeep making the 3hr plus journey to Dover. We were lucky, we made good time and despite the later than anticipated start we even made it onto an earlier ferry!

On the ferry Ron got his new phone out and laughed. "You know what I've done don't you? I've set the alarm for next Friday!" Ron is usually so organised I never even bothered to set mine as in previous trips I am usually woken by him walking along the corridor for a shower 15 minutes before our agreed get up time. He always beats the alarm but I

guess the Merlot the previous evening may have taken its toll.

The drive down to the Cher region went without mishap other than the window wiper blade falling off and an unhooking mat working its way loose on the roof – don't ask. As usual we travelled a day earlier than we needed to and booked a hotel close by. It's so nice not having to worry about traffic jams en-route, worrying about if you are going to make it to the draw on time and we always look forward to a nice meal in the evening after travelling and so much more civilised to get up in the morning, shower, breakfast then a short journey to the lake feeling totally fresh. I guess it's an age thing showing through but I would recommend our approach to anyone. Bizarrely enough,



night catch was because of the start of this weather being so good for feeding but the cold water gushing through this dammed water had become a little too cold. I was soon to learn this wasn't why I had stopped catching though...

THE WEATHER

really had been cruel and by the time the evening meal came

I found myself cooking for four inside my bivvy with the three other bodies inside as well. I say cooking, but to be fair I was simply warming a chilli through that Martin the cameraman had brought along for us all. After all the action I had received the first night on the really soft ground, it got me thinking. Ron had found firm ground but the only action he'd had apart from the cat had been on the outside of his bait where it too was very soft. We discussed this and he decided to spread his rods a little and only fish one on the obvious firm area with three in the softer bits. The result was a 40lb 14oz as well as a large fish that he suffered a hook pull with, in the softest area he had put a bait in.

We were now into Thursday and I'd not had a carp since the Monday although a rogue catfish had attached itself somewhere in between. Now this really didn't make sense. I love fishing in silt but not usually in as soft a silt as I had in front of me on the Saturday when we set-up. I baited it and had a great hit of fish. Sunday it was polished off and the bottom felt, to my mind, much nicer.

Monday it was cleaner still but the fish didn't appear to come back. Wednesday and Ron was starting to get action in the slop after struggling on the firm. Now there was little doubt that the fish had cleared my area but once cleared they hadn't wanted to feed off a clean table. Hindsight is easy but after a night of six big carp it's difficult to change what you are doing but with Ron catching in the slop at the side of his clean area I moved my two right-hand rods over to the left to once again fish in slop and extended my baiting to still cover two rods on the firm but also two rods in slop.

Now that was all that was required and those two rods in the slop went on to produce a 34lb 14oz, 39lb 4oz and a 36lb 2oz in the following few hours whilst Ron added fish of 38lb 8oz, 41lb and a 34lber, again all out of what was little more than soup. With just one night of our session left we were talking about what would round the trip off. We had both caught big mirrors in the past but there was a good chance of beating our PB commons at Castle. Ron said how much he would like to beat his which had stood for over 20 years with what at the time was a huge UK common of 38lb 10oz. I commented that since starting it had been a desire of mine to capture a common over 44lb simply because that was what the record was when I started carping.

The camera crew left and finally we were able to relax a little for our final evening and

opened a bottle of red to celebrate the action we had received. One glass down and Ron was away. I grabbed one of our personal video cameras and started filming and decided to keep it running in one hand whilst I netted it with the other. Neither of us were ready for the great big common that rolled into the net and I am so pleased I kept the camera rolling just to hear our gibberish excited talk! Without needing to weigh it, Ron's new PB common clearly sat in the net only a short while after saying that was what he really wanted. The scales said 48lb 4oz! We might have been at this game a long while but we were like a pair of giggling school kids for the rest of the evening repeatedly saying 48lb 4oz common!

Well, you can imagine what we were like a few hours later when I netted a common of 50lb 8oz! I wasn't going to wake Ron as he had a long drive ahead of him the next day but I simply couldn't contain myself after I had weighed it. Both our wishes had come true after only a few hours of mentioning them.

The above episode has totally changed my thoughts on silt fishing. Had we not been on a filming mission and needing to be in a large swim I would have upped sticks on the Tuesday, but in hindsight the fish were there all along just not wanting to actually feed on the firmer ground which I find quite odd but they had their reasons.

The moral of this story is to never be put off by really, and I mean really soft silt.

SHAUN HARRISON ■

despite being in the least populated area of France, way away from the sea we actually found a restaurant specialising in seafood and especially mussel dishes. We both enjoy good food and I must say that meal was as good as any we have had on a 'night before' and we have certainly had plenty of those.

The next morning we arrived at this new water that Angling Lines Fishing Holidays have recently taken on, Castle Lakes. Our first view of it was rather spectacular from a farm road high on a hill. We cruised to the bottom of the hill and saw the old castle the water takes its name from. For the previous few miles we hadn't seen any signs of human life, no cars or anything, just how I like it.

AFTER INTRODUCING

ourselves, we were finally able

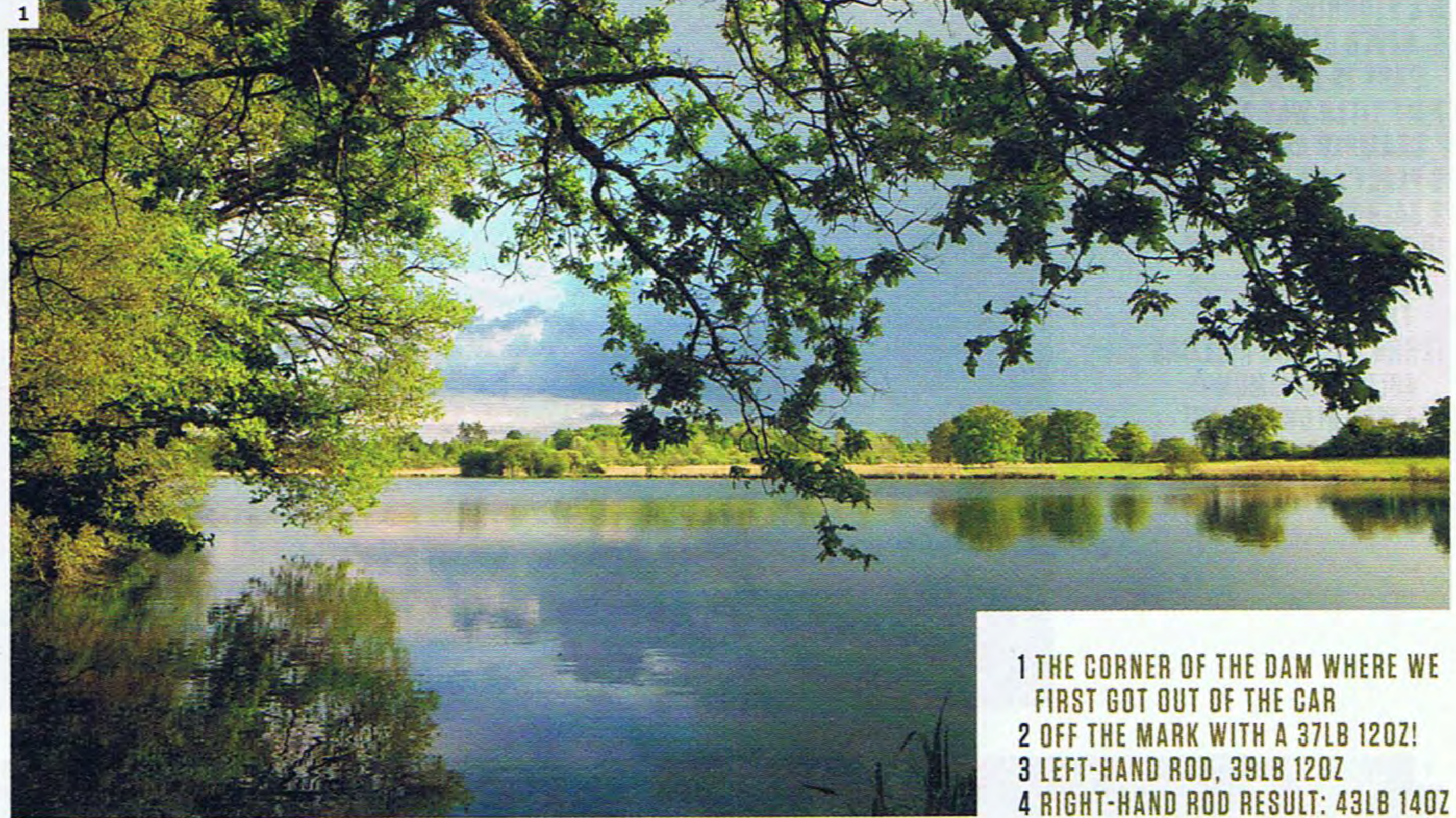
to drive along the track passing a lovely looking pool on the right before arriving at the dam end of this 40-odd-acre venue which was to be our home for the next week. Ron cut the engine and stepping out into the rain we said nothing for a few moments whilst taking our surroundings in and then both made comments along the lines of we were going to enjoy it here. As we walked around it reminded me so much of some of our old English meres I have spent so many wonderful times at.

There were just two Dutch anglers booked on other than ourselves who had actually pre-booked their swims a couple of years previously, so with them already in their swims it gave us freedom of choice without worrying about swim draws. Swim choice for our part wasn't so straightforward, as being a new venue for Angling Lines we were to have their film crew turn up on the Tuesday to hopefully capture some action. This is the side many anglers don't see, where you don't necessarily set-up where you really want to be as you have to take into account backgrounds and available light. It's no good being stuck in a nice intimate little bay if the film crew needs to show a decent expanse of water.

After a little deliberation we settled on a swim that had a number 5 in it, simply because it was roughly in the middle of the lake, offered a good vantage point for viewing the rest of the lake and we could both bivvy up in it with it being one of the few double swims available. From past experience this certainly makes for easier filming as the crew is always there in the right swim when action occurs.

Unfortunately this time I couldn't use one of my usual edges on this type of water: getting the baits out quickly and then letting all the other anglers spook the fish with their marker rods to the quietest area of the lake, which I try and make my swim. This is a great way of getting a couple of quick bites, not worrying about the baiting for the first night, instead relying on bags etc., as chances are there will already be bait in your swim from the previous week on many venues.

With no-one else likely to be spooking/moving the fish we decided to get all the commotion over with to start with and both set about finding what we had in front of us.



1 THE CORNER OF THE DAM WHERE WE FIRST GOT OUT OF THE CAR
2 OFF THE MARK WITH A 37LB 12OZ!
3 LEFT-HAND ROD, 39LB 12OZ
4 RIGHT-HAND ROD RESULT: 43LB 14OZ



Three casts with the marker at clock angles of 11, 12 and 1 o'clock it was soon apparent that it was going to be very much like the English meres I have fished: just one big silted up bowl with little depth variation until close in. I was happy with this as I have done plenty of this silt fishing before and could see my old Mangrove tactics coming in really useful here.

Once I had established that the bottom simply felt soft all over, I opted to pick an area and create an interesting spot myself by introducing bait to just one area and fishing all the rods on it rather than diluting the bait and trying to attract them to three or four different areas which always seems a little pointless to me when you don't have any obvious features in front of you. I very much prefer to make an obvious dining area for them. It has worked so well for me on seemingly featureless waters in the past that it is difficult for me to mess around doing anything else.

Ron suddenly announced he had found a firm hump at 95-metres, clean as anything but silt either side before and beyond. I was jealous, very jealous, I had nothing in front of me so I really concentrated on the marker work, closing my eyes to REALLY feel the lead along. Eventually I found an area where it skipped along just that bit free-er, not quite clogging the same, so I popped the float up on it, smack-on the dot 80mt, and announced I had found my spot.

We were allowed to use a boat for baiting so I donned the lifejacket and paddled myself out with

a hearty good meal for the carp to hopefully start polishing the area cleaner still. Once at the float I decided to have a prod around with a long landing net pole. I wish I hadn't bothered for what felt like a lovely smooth bit from the bank very much resembled the top of a trifle from prodding it. The bottom was that soft I couldn't really feel when the landing net handle touched it and I retrieved it for a smell of the silt to make sure it was healthy (the smell of soil) rather than rotten (the smell of bad eggs) I was rather surprised to see the bottom make-up stuck to the handle much deeper than I thought I had prodded. Fortunately it smelt like good silt though. I had to make a quick decision, I hadn't found anything that felt dramatically different so took the gamble and started to spray my bait over the side, over an area of probably 25ft long by around 10ft.

The silt that was stuck to the handle was a very fine gritty type substance, tiny, minute grains of sand. Back on the bank I wasn't over happy with what I had in front of me and even worse, when Ron went out and found his spot, it was really hard and he couldn't push his handle into it!

Eventually we were sorted with our kit stashed away and able to finally sit back two days after first loading the car outside Ron's house – finally we were angling. Four rods were allowed so I did my usual of a pop-up, a bottom bait, a wafter and a snowman to hopefully quickly ring the changes. I was so concerned about the feel of the soft silt and the fact that Ron had



- 5 A STUNNING 41LB 10OZ
- 6 NEVER SEEN SO MUCH CORK IN A SWIM!
- 7 MY TITAN WAS A TAD CRAMPED AT TIMES!
- 8 PEACE AND TRANQUILITY
- 9 34LB 14OZ
- 10 THE 13FT HI 'S'-IVES WERE PUT THROUGH THEIR PACES
- 11 RON WITH HIS AMAZING 48LB OZ COMMON
- 12 I WAS BLOWN AWAY! 50LB 8OZ



found a clean firm area I only fished three rods on my main bait and put the other at 30m where it started to shallow up and I too could feel a firm bed but not that firm; if I pushed a little further I broke the earth's crust and masses of bubbles would escape. Coming back another few metres and it really was tough so I baited a small line from the soft to the hard. Bait for me was equal amounts of: 10, 15 and 20mm Quest Baits Magnum Duo and Ghurkka Spice; Magnum and Ghurkka Maximum Action Pellets; Micro Feed and Mini Mixed Pellet. I wanted as many different food signals emitting from the area as I could achieve and had also added Magnum Glug and lake water to the blend before I had started to set-up.

EARLY EVENING,

whilst tucking into a Vindaloo, I couldn't believe my luck,

despite all the commotion I had made with the marker rod and the prodding around from the boat, a huge flat spot had started to appear over my baited area. I rushed the meal down, sure that one of the rods would burst into life at any moment. The light faded and still the flat spot continued a couple of hours after it had first started. I began to get concerned the rigs were tangled, although they hardly ever do. I couldn't bring myself to recast any as all three were bang-on the money and obviously the fish were busy munching away in the slop.

Ron's area was producing no flat spot at

all. I couldn't believe I wasn't even getting liners although I had positioned my baits purposely on the nearside of the baited patch. Eventually tiredness overcame me and I had to retire to my bed. That didn't last long though, for as soon as I got into the bag the right-hand buzzer went into meltdown mode. I was out, on it and obviously into a good fish. With my first fish of every session I tend to be a little careful with never knowing how they will be feeding until I see the type of hook hold I have achieved. When eventually in the net I needn't have worried, it was totally nailed. The bait it had fallen to was a hand-rolled wafter, utilising the Quest Baits Fluoro Pop-Up mix diluted down in colour and buoyancy with the Yellow Birdy Mix.

That was the start of a rather busy night for me and by 8:45am I had landed fish of 37lb 12oz, 39lb 12oz, 43lb 14oz, 33lb 8oz, 41lb 10oz and a big double. I was shattered and really should have gone back out and introduced more bait but with a 30mph crosswind and heavy rain persisting I decided to get some much-needed sleep and hope it abated a little. When I did take the Bic Boat back out it took me forever. Twice I was close to my marker and twice I was blown backwards faster than I could move forwards.

When the wind finally eased to a mere 20mph I recast the rods and felt a very satisfying 'donk' on two of the rods. My sloppy area of silt had obviously been cleared during the night and with a fresh bed of bait

out there I was more than a little optimistic of another lively night.

Ron's turn came during the evening with a 36lb 12oz which made me feel much better after hogging all the action earlier in the day. We have fished with each other a lot in various countries and know our catches generally even themselves out and have always preferred to have our own swims and not share runs like some do whilst away.

Sunday night we turned in early expecting more nighttime feeding, so imagine my surprise when I woke up Monday morning to motionless Shaun the Sheep indicators hanging there. Ron had landed a 50lb plus cat in the night but other than that we had both been able to catch up on the sleep lost the night before, which isn't a bad thing.

Monday passed without incident and because I hadn't received signs of action I decided to leave my area undisturbed and not re-bait it. I did treat it to fresh hookbaits though and felt the pleasing donk down off all the leads. I now had a decent clear area to fish over. Tuesday and still no more fish turned up for either of us although we spent sometime away at the supermarket stocking up to be able to feed the film crew, and this included buying larger pans to cook with; we hadn't realised we would be catering for them.

We had it in our heads that after four days of almost constant rain following three weeks of hot weather, that it had dropped the water temperature a little too much. I felt my first