




Andy Little's angling adventures

The nation's No.1 all-rounder comes up trumps - usually! - wherever he goes.
Photography by Mark Little

THIS WEEK:
Lake Alvito, near Vidigueira, Portugal

Mick Jagger carp that gave me satisfaction



'Mick Jagger lips' Around half of the carp that Andy caught had these strange big, rubbery mouths. Locals believe they developed these while grazing on the hard shelled crayfish.

VENUE

This 3,657-acre reservoir is one of many in the area. Carp and black bass are the predominant species, with some colossal commons caught to 72 lb.

ANDY'S AIM

He's on an exploratory trip as the guest of FLAP-HOLIDAYS with proprietor Phil B Rosa-Leeke, targeting big carp.

CONDITIONS

Torrential rain, gale force winds and just the odd glimpse of the sun between storms. Temperatures hovered around 20 degrees on a low but rising pressure of 990 mb.

I'M AMAZED that Portugal hasn't really become a popular angling destination for travelling carpers, as from what I can make out the potential is absolutely enormous. There are a mass of waters available either free of charge or on a very low cost day-ticket basis.

Phil B Rosa-Leeke was born in Northampton but moved to Portugal in 1978 and reckons to speak the lingo more fluently than his native tongue. An avid coarse angler fishing mainly for carp and barbel, he is at the forefront of setting up Portugal's first association for carp anglers.

He has got to know the area like the back of his hand and has fished many of the reservoirs and rivers throughout the country. A couple of years ago he set up FLAP-HOLIDAYS to help anglers on holiday in Portugal.

He arranges a comprehensive package, including car hire, hotel bookings and detailed maps of where to fish, and licensing and day ticket requirements. You just arrive at the airport, where a hire car and maps are waiting, and are free to roam and fish wherever you fancy.

We concentrated on one of the many reservoirs in the Vidigueira area, which was a couple of hours' drive from Lisbon airport. Other reservoirs in the area that are definitely worth a visit are Odivelas, Roxo, Monte da Rocha and Alqueva, which is Europe's largest man-made lake, with a shoreline of a 1,100 km (683 miles).

I thought location would probably be a daunting prospect, but I was gobsmacked to find carp showing at every spot we pulled up on. There were loads of them in the margins, as well as fish crashing out all over the place.

Phil said that the biggest problem was trying to get through to the big ones. The carp seem to breed like rabbits because of the nature of the water and the climate, and there are fish of every size and year class.

It seemed to be a matter of wading through



Andy's two-day session started off sunny and calm, but this soon changed as gale force winds and heavy rain blew in. He was very grateful that there was excellent road access meaning that he could fish out of the back of the car.



Phil can supply buckets of cooked maize and hemp at a very reasonable price to save the hassle of bringing lots of bait on a plane.

lots of singles, doubles and twenties to get at the bigger fish. No one has found a magic recipe for targeting the big lumps.

Most of the monsters are caught by accident, with fish of over 60 lb coming out every year, the biggest authenticated fish a massive common of 72 lb. It certainly gives you a feeling of expectation when the indicator screams off!

I thought bait was going to be a problem, as the baggage restrictions on budget airlines are quite limiting. I took all of the fishing gear I needed but was unable to take any extra bait, such as a stack of boilies. Instead I took plenty of pop-ups, and Phil supplied big buckets of maize and hemp, which is a service he offers to all of his clients. This certainly made life a lot easier.

I was surprised to find that the reservoirs were quite clear, reasonably weedy, but in some areas full of snags.

Phil took us to a lovely peninsula at the north end of the reservoir that gave us plenty of clear water and a good vantage point for covering a big area. This reservoir was quite shallow, with a nice, hard, shingle shoreline gently sloping into a couple of metres of water at about 60 yards.

We intended fishing the reservoir for a couple of days before moving off to target big barbel on the rivers. I started by catapulting out a big bed



1 Andy reckons these are the hardest fighting carp he has hooked anywhere in the world. Many of the big doubles and low twenties were over 3 ft long. There were fish of all sizes crashing in front of Andy.



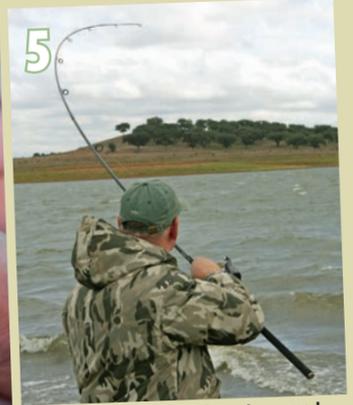
2 Carp in the surf. Andy struggles to control another lively double in the gale force winds. Just holding on to the net was a task in itself, let alone getting the fish in it.



3 There's no night fishing in Portugal, so it was back to a comfy hotel for a hot meal every night at the delightful Santa Clara at Vidigueira, ten minutes from the reservoir.



4 Andy kept the set-ups basic – a couple of pop-ups on a long-shank hook suspended two or three inches off the bottom, held down with a Kwik Change Pop Up Weight.



5 Andy lost two very big fish on the second day, both of which stripped a hundred yards of line from his spool before finding sanctuary among submerged trees.



6 One of the flooded bays on Alvito reservoir. There are lots of snaggy areas.



7 Andy used ultra-strong, new long-shank carp hooks from Fox, which proved to be ideal for getting a solid hook-hold in the very rubbery mouths.



8 Andy kept his set-ups very simple, with 12 lb main line, a semi-fixed lead and a 12 lb Illusion Fluorocarbon hook link to a double pop-up rig.



9 The only bait that Andy took with him were sweet and fishmeal flavoured pop-up boilies.

of maize, over which I planted a couple of double pop-up rigs – one with a sweet flavour and another with fish, to see what worked best.

The weather was reasonably calm and sunny when we arrived, but the wind got up quickly and the Heavens opened. I was glad that the road access was good and we could almost fish from the car, which was a real plus given the dreadful conditions. The weather had been wonderful right up to our arrival, and Phil had warned us to pack plenty of sun cream. I think rust protector would have been more appropriate!

It took all of ten minutes for us to get our first take, which screamed off at a hundred miles an hour and then stripped off another 25 yards of line against a heavily set clutch.

I thought I had latched into one of the monsters with my first cast, but after an unbelievable fight I was amazed when I put the net under a mint condition common of no more than 12 lb. It was like being attached to an express train.

Phil claimed that all of the fish fight like this, and he wasn't exaggerating. By the end of the first day I was exhausted. I'd landed over 40 carp from 8 lb to just over 20 lb – all commons and all hell bent on putting as much distance as possible between us as possible.

Day two and the weather got even worse. The wind whipped up to 50-60 mph, and huge waves crashed onto the shoreline. Even wading out up to my waist I couldn't catapult freebies any more than a few yards, but it didn't seem to matter. As long as I kept plenty of bait going in, the runs were continuous. Playing big doubles and twenties in the 'surf' was quite an experience, and in a masochistic way quite enjoyable.

In the afternoon I hooked a couple more express trains, which powered off with over one hundred yards of line and found sanctuary in some submerged trees, where the hook link parted. I've no idea how big these fish were, but they were unstoppable. I had a very similar amount of fish on day two, the best just over 23 lb, all commons again. About 50 per cent of the fish had the most peculiar mouths I've ever seen. They had what I would call 'Mick Jagger lips'.

The locals seem to think it's to do with their natural diet of crayfish. It certainly didn't stop them fighting, that's for sure. They provided some of the best scraps I've had from carp anywhere in the world. Reluctantly we pulled off the reservoirs with the promise of some giant Comizo barbel on the rivers the next morning. I'll let you know how we fared with them next week.

BOOKING A TRIP

FLAP-HOLIDAYS offer tailor-made trips to suit individual tastes, based around a self-drive car hire package, pre-booked accommodation, comprehensive maps, lots of local information about the best restaurants etc., and all your fishing licences. Deals start at around £475 per angler, per week, but you need to book your own flights. For more information contact Phil B Rosa-Leeke on 00351 925 307 224 or e-mail enquiry@flap-holidays.com or log on to their web site at www.flap-holidays.com



Phil B Rosa-Leeke



The classic lines of a Portuguese common – big head, broad shoulders and a long body with massive fins like propellers.

