

# ABBHEY ADVENTU

It's a slow start to the year for Calum when he makes a return trip to Abbey Lakes.





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*The blank-saving Heron Lake mirror*



**I**n 2012 I was lucky enough to get a winter trip to the famous Abbey Lakes complex in France with the purpose of doing some filming for the Gardner Tackle website and YouTube channel. We did really well with all three of us catching new PBs and even two fifties between us. We had been keen to get back ever since, and it was on 5th January that Alan Stagg, Tom Oliver and I set off in the early hours of the morning to catch the Eurotunnel and then make the short drive to Abbey on the other side.

On arrival we were greeted by the bailiff, Rupert, who gave us the low-down on what been coming out. It seemed that Heron Lake had been fishing well with Max Cottis bagging a load of fish including the biggest in the Lake at a new top weight of over 94lb. However, his action had been slowing down so he recommended that we all set up in peg 5 on Kingfisher Lake. Kingfisher has a reputation for being a catfish water (which it certainly is with at least three of them going over 180lb!) but now it is being fished much more for the carp with a good average size of 35-40lb and plenty of them too. There is also the allure of the unknown with both massive mirrors and commons sighted but as yet not gracing anglers' nets. This certainly sounded a good prospect for a couple of nights, and all being in the same swim would be good for filming and socialising purposes too – ideal!

### Stuck in the middle

We soon jumped back in the van and made the short drive around to the swim. Once there we decided

which side of the swim we wanted to be in. Alan got first choice and went in the right-hand side and then Tom went in the left-hand side, so I was left stuck in the middle!

Rupert had been kind enough to draw us a map of the spots that he been baiting while he had fished the swim during the year, so getting the rods out was going to be nice and easy. It was only a short cast to each of the spots so, with a lead on a braid rod, I had a couple of casts on to each area to check it was clean. As Rupert had promised they were all crystal clear with heavy weed just behind, where the

fish were spending a lot of their time. With the wraps marked, the rods were spread on to the three different areas and, as we had very little knowledge of tactics on the Lake, we all chose to fish differently on each rod to hopefully stumble on a winning method. I chose to bait the left-hand rod heavily with maize and fish a small stack of maize over the top, and the middle and right-hand rods were on an area baited lightly with boilies, fishing snowman hookbaits over the top. We were all done just before dark and, with the bivvies up, we settled back with some teas



*Looking out from Peg 15 on Heron*

*Main pic: Grim conditions on Abbey Kingfisher Lake*

*Far left: The maize stack rig on which I have caught well from Heron*

*Left: Strong tackle that stays pinned to the bottom*





**My one bite winter spod mix**

for a chat before the early start got the better of us and it was time for an early night. Sadly, it was a quiet night all around, apart from a few fish showing near Tom's spot during the morning.

We decided to get a lot of filming done during the day so we could concentrate on the fishing for the rest of the trip. This meant playing around with the Go Pro, doing lots of underwater footage which was good to see too. Apart from a few more shows on the far side of the Lake, we were a bit concerned about the lack of activity. A quick chat with Rupert eased our nerves slightly; he said that it would probably take a couple of days for them to get on the bait, so the second night was the best night for a bite. He also informed us that we could place our rigs and baits from a boat as they're allowed on Kingfisher. This would mean that we were 100% confident we were on presentable areas and the bait was tightly on the rig. It took a little bit longer than hoped, though, and it was nearly dark by the time all of the rigs were in position. Still, we were much more confident of some action that night. Many cups of tea were shared, and a big meal cooked up before turning in for the night, hopeful of a whacking great carp waking us up!

Sadly, it was another blank night, so in the morning we had a team meeting and decided a change of swim or lake was in order for the final night.

### Change of plan

After two nights of inactivity on



**Hectic action on the syndicate big lake**

Kingfisher, we decided to have a change of plan and moved to Heron in search of a blank saver for the last night. We would have to be off very early on the Sunday morning anyway. Heron is far from a runs water but it had been doing some fish, and with no one fishing it, we would be able to set up wherever we fancied. I decided to set up in peg 15 where a nice south-westerly wind was blowing in, whereas Tom and Alan decided to spread out a little bit more to try and track down the fish.

Having caught well on Heron last time fishing maize stack rigs, I planned to do it again on all rods, fishing in hope of just one bite in the short amount of time available. The rigs were kept simple with a short length of 25lb brown Sink Skin, a size 6 Wide Gape Talon Tip with a ring opposite the barb, finished off with two pieces of real maize and one piece of glow-in-the-dark maize. I wanted to minimise disturbance to make sure any fish already in the swim weren't spooked, so all I was going to do was have a couple of casts with a 2oz lead on braided main line to find a presentable area. This didn't take long as there was very little weed about, and within the hour I had all three rods well spread out around the swim on lovely clean areas of silt.

To add a bit of attraction to the hookbaits I put three Spombs of bait accurately over each rod. Into a bucket I put a handful of maize and another handful of hemp, and then I crumbed up a good few handfuls of CC Moore's new



**The successful tactics on the big lake**

Equinox boilies, which have a lovely fruity smell, as well as my favourite winter bait, Live System. The final additions were a good glug of the Live System dip and some of the awesome Chilli Hemp Oil. There was very little in the way of actual food in the spod mix, but plenty of smell and visual attraction from the maize to draw the fish to the area and hopefully trick them into making a mistake.

As we all settled back for the night, Tom and Alan had seen a few shows in their swims and were hopeful, whereas the inviting wind blowing into my swim had stopped and it felt a bit colder with light drizzle in the air. After making a big curry for dinner I turned in for an early night, knackered from the long hectic day after moving. I was woken shortly afterwards by a mouse going through my bags. After finding him he slowly waddled out of the bivvy, having stuffed his face with boilies!

I was again woken in the early hours by a rat running through my rods. In a bit of a daze it took a minute to work out what had happened. Moments later the middle rod was letting out its battle cry as line was ripped from the tight clutch. I slipped on my boots and made the treacherous dash down the muddy slope to the rod. The fish kited quickly on a long line, heading for the back of the island opposite, but clamping down on the spool quickly turned it. After that it almost felt as if it had come off as it just swam all the way into the margin. Then it ploughed around, trying its very best to wipe out my other rods. Without a headtorch it was a bit of a nightmare, but eventually it was bundled into the net – I let out a big sigh of relief as I had beaten the blank! With the headtorch on I could see it was not as big as I had hoped, weighing in at 28½lb. I slipped it into the retainer sling ready to do some shots and filming in the morning.

As we had to leave by eight o'clock on the final morning, Tom and Alan had to pack up before coming round to help me. Tom was doubly annoyed as he had fish showing all over him when he had to

reel in, which was a shame! The shots and filming were soon completed, and we were loading up the van and heading off home. Although this trip had not been as successful as our first trip, we had enjoyed it. It had still been a great laugh and the allure of the enormous, dark, scaly mirrors in all the lakes of the complex ensure I will be planning another trip soon!

### Rain stops play

Since the Abbey trip I haven't really been up for carp fishing. With the constant torrential rain my local waters are heavily flooded and, therefore, not very conducive to a comfortable day's fishing. I have managed a couple more days on the big lake at the syndicate, but the influx of cold water has slowed the action. The best session was one I shared with fellow Gardner-sponsored angler, Tom Oliver. Fishing zigs with bright white or yellow pop-ups as singles at range we caught around a dozen fish to upper-doubles in a few hours. It was great fun getting a bend in the rod, but the rain and gale-force crosswinds soon returned and it was time to beat a hasty retreat back to the warmth of home!

I have also been having a go at fishing for some other species. A couple of days perch fishing on various venues with some friends has helped me get back to my fishing roots and just enjoy going fishing again. I have even managed to catch a couple up to a new PB of just over 2lb and I hope to catch an even bigger one soon.

However, for the next month I hope to do a few sessions on another lake with good winter form that I have got a ticket for in the hope of catching some of the nice big mirrors it holds!



**A scraper twenty – good fun in horrible conditions!**



**A lovely perch – something new and exciting**