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Carthagena Weir

By Bob Hornegold

A good friend of mine, Jerry Hammond, took over Carthagena Fishery in August 2003. The venue consists of two lakes which are now syndicated, a weir pool off the Lee Navigation, and a short length of the river, plus a section of the Cornmill Stream. The first year Jerry owned it I fished the main lake on a day ticket and caught some nice carp from there. We did a feature for one of the carp magazines. After a night of bivvying up and a couple of carp I decided to creep round to the shallows, where I spied a group of carp in a small hole in the weed



Flicking out a bunch of lobworms into the hole, this group of carp scattered, charging down their well-worn escape routes. One of the carp was a lightly-coloured common, and he was back. Watching him through my Polaroids I saw him enter one of the channels in the weed, and he was swimming towards where my worms still lay.

He seemed to be on a mission, speeding up as he negotiated the channel. I had to speed up to keep up with this carp: he seemed intent on getting to those worms before his friend could, and as I reached the rod, so this common flicked up his tail and sucked in the bunch of worms. The battle commenced, a tug and war that ended in the favour of the angler, a mint common of 22lbs, don't let anyone tell you carp don't remember. This carp certainly did and the memories are still very much alive.



For the first couple of years at Carthagea I fished with Gary Newland, a great angler and long-time friend. In that time I caught carp to over 20lbs, double-figure barbel, and chub to over 7lbs. Later I fished there with Simon King; where we concentrated on the zander. Simon managed a 9lb 10oz zander and I had one of 9lbs 4oz. Simon went on to catch a 15lbs 5oz zander from Wyboston, something I failed miserably in. Zander are my bogey species, but Carthagea still I think offers me the best chance of a double? It's a wonderful fishery created by Jerry and his wife Joanne.

I have known Jerry Hammond for a good number of years through carp fishing together at Landridge and field testing for DT baits when raconteur and ex-racing driver, Stud owned the business. I'm still friends with both, but a lot of water has passed under the bridge since those days, I'm now seventy one and, to be honest, struggling with my health. In November 2015 I had a stroke. Getting over that, Ann and I prepared to move house from London to the East Coast, but two days before the move and I had a heart attack, needing three stents fitted into a blocked bypass graft which was done in 2010. Before all these problems I had caught a few decent perch from Carthagea, my biggest in 2015 being 3lbs 6ozs, but I had dropped a couple of bigger fish at the net and I was going back to put that right.



Carthagea is the deepest weir pool along the 23-mile length of the Lea Navigation, with over 20ft in places, and it holds some amazing fish. Historically Carthagea Weir has produced some brilliant fish for a group of friends and me. They included Gary Newland, Simon King and Clive Bradley, all members of the Osprey Specimen group: Clive is the secretary and Simon was the treasurer. My good friend Simon King died in 2013 at the age of 51, after a short battle with cancer. He had fished Carthagea a great deal and was an excellent all-round specimen hunter; Carthagea weir had been kind to him, netting specimen fish of many species from the Pool, the Rope and the Road Bridge swims.

His fish included barbel over double figures, chub of 7lbs plus, zander to just short of 10lbs and double-figure bream, not to mention the rouge carp that wonder the Lea Navigation to over 36lbs. These are just an example of fish we caught from that section of the Lea.

I'm going to fish the swim where Simon's ashes were scattered, and think about the good times we spent fishing together: great memories. I moved all my gear around the corner, cast out a rod baited with lobworm and turned around to sort out my camp for a day's fishing. I was rudely made aware that something was going on with the rod I had just cast out, when I heard a noise of the rod being dragged across the platform. I grabbed the handle of the rod and within seconds of casting out; a two pound eight ounce perch lay at the bottom of the landing net. Now that's what you call a wonderful start to a day!

I carried on catching baits which I placed in my bait box, until another good friend of mine turned up for a chat. Moving to the East coast is great, but I have to admit that I do miss my old friends. Time passed quickly chatting to Dave, and an explosion of fry in front of us, signalled an attack by a group of perch. I responded by placing a livebait amongst the melee and was rewarded with two perch around the 1lb mark – looking like peas in the pod – on consecutive casts. It was brilliant fun and well worth all the effort of getting up at 4 am. Dave left wishing me well and convinced me that I would have a bigger perch before going home.

He was not wrong, with a worm rod on the right hand side of the swim and a lively rod on the left hand side of the swim, the time was approaching 5.30 when the left hand rod went off and a spirited fight ensued. I honestly thought I had another small pike on, but as the fish rolled on the surface it was indeed a perch, and a good-un at that. The fish was soon in the net, but the other rod had gone off. I sorted myself out and rang Jerry who had just returned from a carp-fishing trip. I weighed the perch and it clocked in at 3lbs 9oz, a new venue PB for me and I felt more than satisfied with my day's fishing. Jerry took the picture and said it was the smallest perch he had photographed this year, but I was happy.

A week later and I'm back at Carthage. I intended to fish with my traditional tackle today. I'll start with the made up carbon rods, catch a few baits and then tackle up with the traditional fishing tackle. I really have turned the clock full circle, having started with Splitcane rods and centrepin reels back in the 1950s. Now, sixty years on and I'm again fishing with split cane rods and centrepin reels. I want a big perch on the traditional gear, and I honestly believe Carthage is the place to fulfil my ambition.

Clive Bradley a Perchfishers member, will be joining me to fish the Weir Pool swim where I had a 3lb 6ozs perch last year. I will fish the same swim as last week. Arriving early I settled into my normal swim and awaited Clive's appearance, but he was a little late. The swim that Clive would normally fish had already been taken, so I suggested we try a couple of swims



towards the end of the fishery, a swim I had fished a lot in the past with my old mate Simon King, The Rope and the swim above. Both swims offered the cover of a small overhanging willow tree. I could drop in right next to the tree and Clive can cast down to it. 'Sounds good,' said Clive, 'it's a plan.'

The day before I had bitten the bullet and climbed into the loft where I keep my fishing tackle. To be honest it's a mess, but my health problems prevented me from tidying up the loft, so it's much the same as when we moved to the house. After an hour rummaging around the rod bags, I found the two George Howell Harrison 1¼lb tc through-action Avon rods that Bob Morris had renovated the year before. I had been using the Specialist Tackle 1lb tc rods as stand-ins, but having dropped two huge perch at the net I decided that my old rods would be better at setting the hook.

I also went up to a 1½ oz leads and a stop bead above the run ring, to assist the bolt rig affect, changing the reel line to 6lb bs Fox Soft Steel (my last spool). My first trial with the rods, rigs and new line was positive, having three runs which were all converted, a small Perch, a very small pike and a 3lb 1ozs perch.

It was an excellent day: a few old friends came round to see me, and the kettle boiled away merrily. We had a good few laughs whilst reminiscing about the good old days.

It's Wednesday the 19th October and my alarm went off at 3am. Opening my bedroom door the house was pitch black. All the fishing tackle was downstairs, and the flask was ready for filling. It was 4.08 am as I left the drive of the house, heading towards the A127 and then the M25, and it was early enough for me to enjoy the drive. I pulled up at the gates of Carthagena Fishery, and the drive had taken me just over the hour. As Clive could not make this week's trip having had had a two day sea-fishing jolly (one of which was a no -go, due to high winds), he had to earn some brownie points. I decided I fancied the look of the swim that Clive had been fishing last week and I dumped my tackle and rod bag there. It took me about an hour and half to catch four gudgeon. The baits were getting harder to catch and I was using them up as soon as I caught them. I had to make a choice, stay in that swim or move further up towards the weir pool? Thinking about it we had left the swim where Clive had had his big perch alone for two weeks and it looked as if no one had fished it, so I started moving everything up river.

Nothing happened for an hour and the time was coming up to 1 pm. To be honest I don't usually have the alarms on in these situations, but because of the unearthly hour I was up I turned on the alarms, just in case I dropped off. I must have been daydreaming when the right hand rod, the cane rod burst into life. My hand was within reaching distance of the handle and centrepin, and the rod and reel were superb. I thought at first I had hooked another pike.

The fished bored off with great power, but the tackle I was using was more than a match for this fish. A huge dorsal fin soon broke the surface and I realised it was not a pike, but a great big perch.



'Careful Robert,' I said to myself. I had dropped two huge perch at the net in the last five weeks and I did not want a repeat by losing another one.

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The hook was in the scissors, I put it back in the landing net and rested it, whilst I sorted out the weigh sling and zeroed the Salter scales. Now the moment of truth: I had already wetted the sling and placed the perch into it. I lifted the scales, 4lbs 6½ozs, a new perch PB for me and well worth the early mornings, and the drive that had become a bit of a mission.



Carthagena is a brilliant fishery and well worth fishing for the price of a season ticket. I'm sure that by the end of this season it should produce a five, so I'll be back – but not yet: I need a rest.

But I was not finished with Carthagena that year and managed to increase my PB to 4lbs 11oz in October, a brilliant end to the season for me. My intention was to fish into the winter for the zander, but a couple more heart attacks and a TIA curtailed those plans for the time being.

2018 and I'm back at Carthagena at the beginning of the season fishing the pool itself, but not having a lot of luck; it seemed every carp in this section of river had decided to shoal up for their spawning ritual. The first few nights on the weir had been a nightmare, with a night of bream fishing par excellence: some must have been over 9lbs, but not for me!! Clive had also joined me on a number of trips; he had loads of bream as well, but managed a couple of small commons amongst the bream.

The next trip to Carthagena my preferred swim was above the rope. It was a lot quieter this time with a much reduced population of carp in the weir, to all intents and purposes spawning had finished. The set up was two 3lb tc Ballistas, modern Baitrunners, 15lb bs line, running leads, 8inch 15lb bs Stealth and size 8 Mugga hooks, and some Salmon boilies that seem to work everywhere. Clive turned up a bit later and went into a swim where some large carp were patrolling in open water. It was an awkward swim but it resulted in another small carp.

I nodded off only to be woken to a full blown screamer. I dived out of the umbrella and by a stroke of luck the new reel had caught on the edge of the wooden platform. The pod had been pulled over, the rods went sideways, but luckily the reel was still turning when I reached it. Lying on my side after diving for the butt of the rod and playing the fish from that position had to be seen to be believed! The sheer amount of power these river carp have is incredible. Then everything went slack: the hook had opened up, quite honestly it's the first of its kind to open and I have now gone to the stronger international Muggas for extra strength.

Even at 72 years of age with a large number of lost fish behind me, the feeling of utter despair at such moments can still affect you, and this was no different. Retackling the rig went out to the same spot. It was going to be a hot day and the thought of packing up in the heat was not to my liking I had a word with Clive and a 9.30 am pack up was agreed.

The baited rig had been back in the water for 4 hrs and I was wondering if the bait was still there, sitting there on the step behind my umbrella, thinking about what an untidy angler I have always been, Suddenly the same rod that I lost the carp to earlier was off. The line tightened, the buzzer would have made a noise, but I got to it first, the battle was on, and what a battle. If any carpers who read this wonder why it was a battle get yourself to a river and feel the power of a river carp. They are mainly uncaught, fight as if their very life depends on it, and are wild creatures, unlike most of their still-water cousins.



Clive was now behind me asking if a hand was needed. 'Yes please,' was the reply. Honestly, in the back of my mind I thought it could be a twenty, but it was not: the common weighed in at just over 17lbs, the best fight from a upper double that I've ever had, possibly!

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Packing away happily Carthage had done me proud again. Another stay in hospital curtailed any more trips to Carthage until November when the perch gods shone on me again, although it was unfortunate that I had a nasty fall.

This put paid to my fishing that year, but there are still fish I want to catch from Carthage Weir: a 20lb Carp, 10lb+ zander and a 5lb perch.

The challenge goes on.

