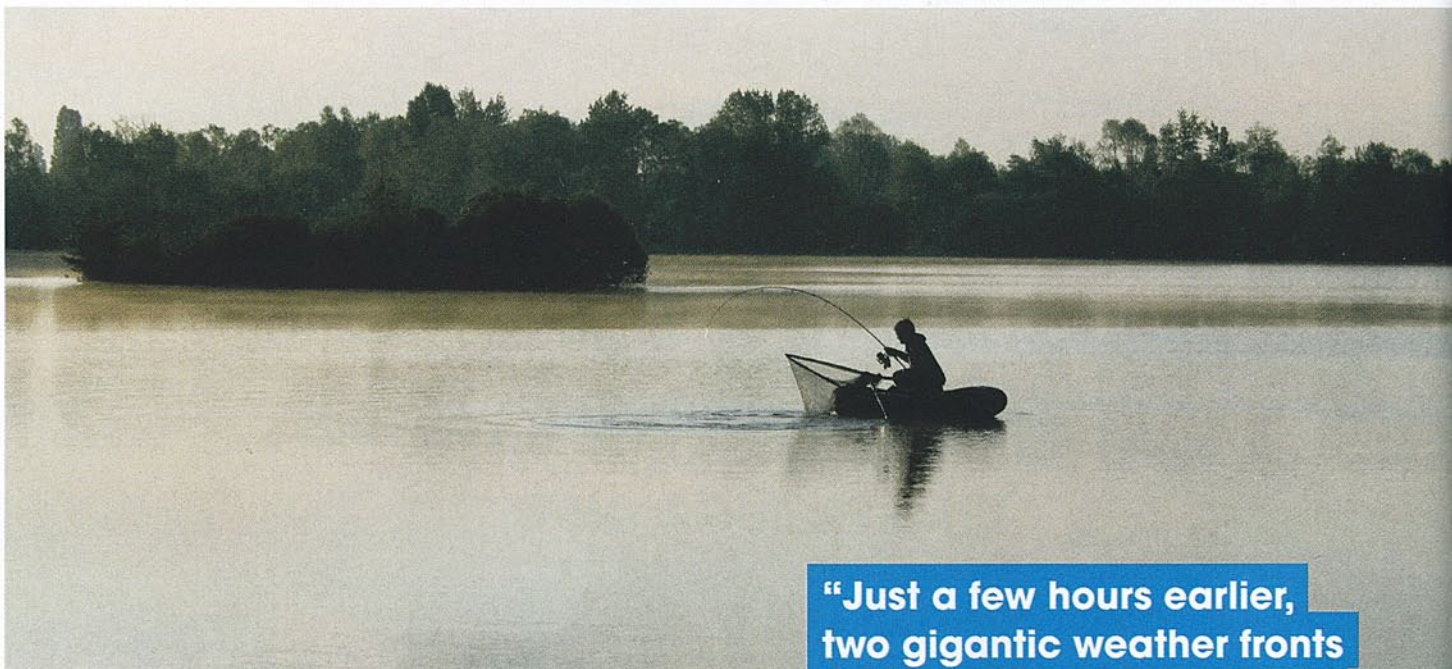


JULIAN JURKEWITZ

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

The bustling waters of the French commercial holiday venues aren't for Julian. For him and his girlfriend Isabell, it's the lure of the unspoiled huge reservoirs of France, and the monsters that live in their depths which make the memories.



**"Just a few hours earlier,
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ever witnessed"**

My girlfriend, Isabell, and I are lying on our bedchairs shrouded in thick brushwood on the shore of one of the numerous big waters we fish every year in the south of France. The lake is situated in a dammed valley high in the mountains, and directly in front of our small, inconspicuous camp, the sun is climbing up above the hills to signal the start of a new day. It is July and the temperature will soon reach a scorching 30 degrees. There are blue skies, no clouds, no wind and the lake is flat, still and calm. There's no sign of the night we have just endured...

Just a few hours earlier, two gigantic weather fronts clashed above our heads. The result was by far the most violent storm I've ever witnessed. Lightning streaked out

of dark, black clouds, simultaneous with booming claps of thunder. It was deafeningly loud. It was fortuitous we weren't on high ground otherwise we would have been quite afraid. I admit we were cringing from time to time, particularly when lightning struck the mountainside behind us. Huge raindrops created rivulets around us and drenched both us and our equipment.

All this, and yet we had an incredible feeling of adventure. The feeling of freedom to witness the incredible power of nature and to feel it on our skin is something the majority of people never experience. Bare-chested and just clothed in shorts, I stood next to my pod and shouted to the gods: "What do you want from us? What? Tell me?"

BOOM! A thunderclap echoes



TOP LEFT A good-sized boat is a prerequisite, both for safety and for the convenience of being able to land fish easily.

TOP CENTRE Isabell is an accomplished angler in her own right, and she's great company on our longer trips.

TOP RIGHT You need good, strong tackle and tons of bait to fish properly on huge lakes. Luckily I have access to both.

FAR LEFT We stood on a headland looking out over the turquoise-green waters. You really can't fish waters like this without a boat.

LEFT You're fishing for the most beautiful fish in the world in the big lakes.



around the mountain. Isabell laughs at me as I jump at the sound and join her underneath our soaking shelter.

Big-water Adventures

Two or three times a year we have the opportunity to fish these huge lakes for 1 or 2 weeks. Like most of the big-water bodies in France, they are artificial lakes created to serve as flood control basins, for drinking water and for energy generation. A barrier lake is created by damming a deep valley, which is then flooded. This construction spares nothing – villages, houses, bridges or streets – they all disappear under the rising water. We often find these areas by using our echo sounder, as they provide an area where the carp like to feed and gather. To place a bait next to an old wall or pile of masonry is often productive. Crayfish and other creatures like to hide in the chinks, mussels find a place to live on stonework, and the carp find them irresistible!

Streets provide a pathway for travelling carp and weed grows to the edges. It's more of an effort for a carp to push through thick weed than travel along a ready-made highway. We like to search out these areas and place our baits on them to trap the carp on their travels.

Flooded woods are a risky hot spot. Carp love to browse amongst the old tree stumps and chase crayfish, but fishing in these areas, both man-made and natural, is fraught with danger. I feel that once hooked, I can steer carp

away from most obstacles, but I much prefer to fish in areas where I know I can present baits properly – and get the fish out without hindrance. With a bit of care you can fish such areas safely, but strong, reliable tackle is needed. Working at Imperial Baits HQ gives me the opportunity to source the best, strongest tackle around, and as for bait, well, we're just surrounded by it. Even so, fishing the big lakes is not for the faint-hearted, and it really does pay to tackle up for your surroundings.

To explain further would be beyond the scope of this feature, so I'll just say that fish usually swim against the pull you exert, otherwise you'd lead them in like a bull with a ring through its nose. The safety of the fish is paramount, so if you're at all unhappy about your newly-found hot spot – don't fish it!

Anyway, I'm digressing here because I'm supposed to be telling you about my fishing on these big lakes.

I get so excited before each trip to these big waters. Every carp angler has their own point of view on what he or she wants from their angling, but for me, I like to catch beautiful big carp. Fish of 20, 25 or even 30kg are what I'm after – and I love to fish waters of more than 1,000 hectares; I just find them so stimulating. The fishing is so different from the norm at home, either on weekend trips or on short overnight sessions on smaller waters.

As a general rule we fish for 2-week sessions. To do this you need good, strong equipment. Our boats are larger, at least 320cm, as we

usually can't fish the spots we want without them. You need access to bankside areas to set up, and access to fresh food if you are away from civilisation for days at a time is important. You also need a good first-aid kit because medical help may be many miles/hours away. You don't want to look a right Charlie with a lacerated foot (or worse), do you?

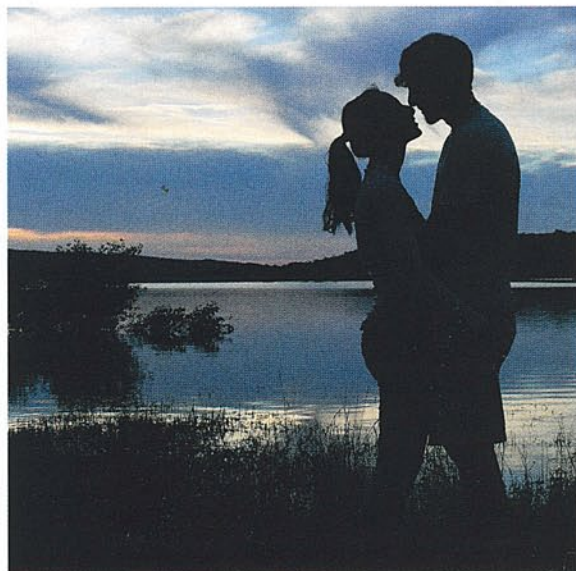
Larger waters mean harsher conditions in general. You have to make sure your tackle is up to it, so robust rods, strong bivvies, waterproof storage and warm clothing are the order of the day. Where we fish, the strong mistral winds can blow up at any time – if one shreds your bivvy then your trip is finished.

Seek and Ye Shall Find

I remember very well my first session at a big lake with more than 2,000 hectares of water surface. Full of awe, we stood on a high-lying viewpoint and stared at the turquoise-green water surface. It was marvellous! We were stunned. Overwhelmed. I had

more questions than answers. Where should we start? Without any previous knowledge, we searched for a central spot. After a browse around with the echo sounder we found depths going down to 20, 30 or even 40m. I began to feed a wide area in depths of 5-18m; the size was roughly half a football field. Compared to the smaller waters I fished, this was unbelievable. I have complete faith in my Carptrack boilies, but how could a carp find my hookbait in such huge waters? After 3 days with nothing to show for it, we decided to move. During these 2-week sessions we fish as many different areas as we feel we need, so plenty of bait is required. I know you cannot reveal the secrets of such big waters in a few days, but sitting there with nothing happening is surely a waste of time.

Those who fish at such giant lakes need to have one attribute – patience! Either that or the motivation to move every couple of days until the fish are found. Moving camp, finding spots, putting out the rods – it all takes



ABOVE Memories are made of this...

BELOW When the water levels are high, the flooded meadows and margins attract fish like a magnet.

"A crucial advantage is to know where the fish spawn, because at these places you'll find the fish during springtime."



time. You become acquainted with the water in a relatively short time, and sometimes you even catch a few. A crucial advantage is to know where the fish spawn, because at these places you'll find the fish during springtime. Usually, on the big waters, these are on flat areas, and you'll find the fish make their home there for weeks at a time in spring. It's at this time of year that the water is usually at its highest, and meadows, bankside bushes and trees will all be underwater. The carp find these areas great for searching and spawning. These areas are also the first to warm up in the sun, so are the places I search for to set up in first. The fish in these large waters are so beautiful – you'll be astounded. The colours, the sheer size and the unspoiled magnificence of big-water fish is something to behold. Both Isabell and I never fail to be overawed by the capture of one of these beasts. They could almost be a different breed entirely, such is their beauty.

The larger waters are the places I love the most. The peace and quiet, the unspoiled beauty, the sheer adventure of being alone in the wild, and the search for the unknown monsters of the deep are, quite simply, a part of my psyche, and it's to these waters that I head for my longer sessions each year. Remember the old saying, 'seek and ye shall find'. Nothing could be truer about fishing the huge waters we fish in France – and the adventures we find along the way are what true memories are made of. **CW**