

Drop Tail at 55lb.
I was ecstatic.



“It had always been a dream of mine to own my own water, as I think every carp angler would secretly like to own their own lake!”

I Love It When A Plan Comes Together!

If you've ever thought about owning your own water on foreign shores, you could be letting yourself in for more than you bargained for... Danny Fairbrass has lived every minute of that dream.



This is The Alamo Swim, almost palatial now.

It had always been a dream of mine to own my own water, as I think every carp angler would secretly like to own their own lake! What I didn't bargain for was all the day-to-day problems that would occur without warning, and how difficult it is to guide things from the UK when the water in question is in France. This is an account of my dream – a dream to own a lake in France. Today the lake is called Gigantica, but it was formerly known as St. Christophe. Let me introduce this desire with the following words: “If anyone reading this is dreaming of owning their own water abroad, then beware, you may as well shovel euro coins into the lake for the first year – as I was to find out for myself!”



Making the new swims with the railway sleepers. Hard work indeed.

When you own a large piece of land, everything costs the earth, because there is so much earth to move! We spent over £5,000 on railway sleepers to rebuild the swims and laid 250 tonnes of type one aggregate into the new track around the lake. We also spent 15,000 euros on digging out a stock pond, a stock

pond that didn't end up any deeper! That's just the tip of the iceberg, mainly because to me, reputation is everything, and I wasn't going to put my name to something that wasn't bang on.

Gigantica doesn't suit everyone's taste, at 35 acres it may be too big for some, however, others love it and revel in the space we have now given between swims. I wanted to create a lake that I would like to fish, where there are both big and beautiful carp of all shapes and sizes, a lake where I had to think about my own angling to be successful and a lake where the atmosphere is always relaxed without being lax.

Twelve months on I think we are finally getting there, and if the visitors' book is anything to go by and the Internet write-ups are to be believed, we have had many, many satisfied customers. Satisfied not just from their catches, but also with the service we provide and their overall enjoyment of what is, after all, a week's holiday. I hate going to lakes where the owner/bailiff is watching your every move; they appear after every buzzer sounds to hurry the fish back in as soon as possible without any real understanding of how long the fish can survive out of water. Sometimes it feels like you are fishing in someone's garden pond and paying heavily for the privilege, only to feel you are walking on eggshells for the week. In my opinion, no numbers of big fish are worth such an oppressive atmosphere. In contrast, other waters are so lax that rule breakers go totally unchecked and the swim in which you are fishing is being poached the second you turn your back, the showers are so filthy you feel dirtier when you get out, the list goes on...

There are fundamental things I want as a carp angler on holiday; the fish is the first thing – for me they must be either big, wild, or special. I think at Gigantica we now have 'big' and 'special' well ... ▶

covered because there is such a diversity of strains in our lake you could be fishing Stonacres, Hardwick, Frimley, and Wraysbury in the UK all in the same 35 acres of water.

The lake has four main groups of carp, starting with the smallest, the scaly, bionic mirrors and equally bionic commons. The mirrors are 16-45lb, depending on year class. Tracing back previous records for the water, we believe they came from a shallow duck shooting lake owned by Gigantica's previous owner. They are simply stunning, it's like fishing Horseshoe with innumerable linears, starbursts, and almost fully-scaled carp, something of a rarity in France. The commons are all growers – short, thick wrist of the tail and big scales – always a good sign. We are currently removing all fish under 19lb and transferring them to our maximum security (Danny the fishery manager sleeps 10yds away and has a shotgun) stock pond, recently redug and now like chicken soup on account of the 20 or so ravenous doubles we have in there at this time. We aim to limit it to 40 fish to get them all to at least mid-20s by late-spring, at which time the drawbridge will be lifted, releasing them back into Gigantica, thus making room for any more 'babies'.

The next strain is the less heavily-scaled 20-50lb carp, again, year class and genetics spread the sizes throughout. The smaller ones are like missiles and the large ones have that classic square shape – small head, big shoulders, and a thick wrist – real growers.

Then there are the larger commons. The best individual carp, which has been christened Cut Tail, has reached 55lb and now comes out between 43 and 53lb, depending on the time of year. This winter

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we expect her to get back to 55lb after removing so many doubles. Most of the other commons are totally mint and weigh between 28 and 47lb. We also have a fish called The Immaculate; we only had pictures which were blurred by camera shake and no weight on record, but we reckoned it was at least 45lb and this was confirmed when she was caught in August at 47lb. What a fish! Danny (our on-site bailiff) has seen a huge common in our snaggiest margin but he cannot either identify or guess the weight of the carp, it's that big – I can't wait for it to come out.

The final strain makes up the crème de la crème of the carp in the lake, the A Team, the real targets for we dedicated big-fish anglers. There are 15-25 of these carp ranging between 50 and 72lb. They are all individuals, yet they all have that 'prehistoric monster' look about them. Fish like The Twin, which I saw on the bank only this morning (I'm writing this whilst I'm fishing), and Cluster, which I photographed for 'Vinwar' last November, are real characters which rarely get caught even though they are fished for every week. The German Fish hasn't been out since last October and should be massive now. I was lucky enough to bank Drop Tail yesterday morning at 55lb, up 2.4lb on its last capture, last week! Prior to that, this carp hadn't been banked since last November when Tim Paisley caught it, it's a truly amazing carp and rates as one of my best captures, ever!

If that wasn't enough I was to experience the most incredible night of



One of the scaly stock pond fish.



Le Grand Fromage feeding the stock pond babies.



Fromage with The Twin at 56lb.



Pete with The Immaculate at 47lb.



Vinny with Cluster from November 2008 at 51lb.

“On viewing our facilities Ron Buss proclaimed, ‘Blimey, that’s better than I’ve got in my house!’”

my angling life when I came face to face with Gigantica’s biggest known resident, The Giant, but more of that later.

An important part of the equation for me when on a fishing holiday is the facilities. We are fortunate that there was a small gîte on site when we bought the place; this had running water, electricity, and a phone line. All very difficult things to get in France if you don’t have them already; I wouldn’t even look at waters that didn’t have them because it is such a mission and so expensive to get it done. Last winter we extended this small building to create two new toilets and a self-contained bathroom, including large shower and ‘trendy’ washbasin. The local bailiffs all laughed when Danny our fishery manager was buying the smartest, most expensive fittings.

“What do you want that for?” they chuckled. “Only carp anglers are using it.”

That may be so, but everyone likes a bit of luxury – I know I do. I have showered in sheds before, or under showerheads that just trickle down and take an hour for you to actually get wet. Sometimes the isolated nature of the venue means little else is possible, but given that we have running water I felt we needed a ‘super shower’. On viewing our facilities Ron Buss proclaimed, “Blimey, that’s better than I’ve got in my house!” That’s exactly what we want, a little bit of the ‘wow factor’. None of this came cheap and we actually had to transport the tiles and the railway sleepers from the UK, to get just the ones we wanted.

The sleepers, which cannot be readily bought in France, had to be hardwood because creosote-stained sleepers are not allowed to be used on the ground in France – well worth knowing if you intend to use them! The swims have been transformed from a death trap of steep gravel to large, flat, carpy areas into which a large bivvy easily fits. I personally helped build The Stock Pond, Pole Position and Alcatraz Swims and believe me, some serious work went into making the 14 new swims that Gigantica now offers.

We changed quite a few of the rules too. You used to be able to book a swim a year in advance – how anyone can know what the best swim will be before actually looking at the lake is beyond me, but that’s how it was. Now we have a draw on Saturday afternoon after everyone has walked around and pumped Danny for information. We feel this is by far the fairest way so everyone has an equal chance

at their favourite swim. To be honest, the swims that have been most consistent are the ones that have been fished the most, and also the ones fished most effectively. For example, Iain Macmillan (aka Ting Tong), who is an angling machine, went in the most unfavoured swim in a recent match against the Dutch and Germans and got the most bites. He simply fished it well and made the most of it! Recently he fished on Co’s Point, a superb swim that covers a lot of water but one that had not produced any massive hits, and promptly had 33 takes in six nights, landing 31. As I said, he’s a machine!

So, how do you fish a swim well? After nearly 12 months on the lake I can now say with some certainty that there is a winning formula.

First of all bring big boilies, 20mm is perfect, any smaller and you will be feeding the bream. Incidentally, we are removing all nuisance species, including bream, roach, and hybrids, but they remain a problem if you are using 14mm hookbaits or smaller. Some ‘clever’ anglers have brought 10mm boilies, much to Danny’s amusement. They may as well have chucked them in the road for all the good they did.

“Put ‘em in the freezer and take ‘em home at the end,” Danny bellows.

Most think he is being awkward and use them anyway – only for a night though – after half a dozen bream they realise he wasn’t joking!

For my sessions at the lake I start the week with 5-8kg of 20mm Mainline Cell on the first night and fish all three rods on the same baited area, with about a rod length between each hookbait and with the middle rod slightly longer than the outside ones. I don’t always catch from the off but I have never gone longer than two days before my first bite, and then once the carp have found the bait the bites get more frequent. Usually the best fish come on ‘Big Fish Thursday’. I am guessing this is the right length of time for the big ‘uns to get on the food and eventually they slip up. We don’t have rakes of 50s out every week, but the real special ones do get caught several times a year. Many anglers get to enjoy their company for a ... ▶



The pop-ups that are really working.



No expense spared with the new toilets.



Power shower, total luxury for all visitors.



My favourite hooking arrangements for Gigantica, Snowman presentations.



Tong's 36lb linear, part of a 31-fish catch!

few minutes, minutes that often change their fishing careers forever.

Getting back to the bait, we don't allow shelf lifes because they do not pop-up to the surface when they go off and generally they have a lower nutritional content in relation to fresh frozen baits. We have big freezers on site for customers' baits so if you don't use it all, you can take it home again. We do sell a selection of Mainline freezer baits and The Cell seems to have taken over as our number one bait this year. The New Grange and Fusion have also both worked well but I am guessing The Cell is the bait of the moment. More people are using it, so the carp get more addicted to it, and so the pattern goes on. I put in an extra 1-2kg after every fish, day or night, all with the throwing stick, and the carp have now started to come to the sound of the bait going in and bites can come soon after rebaiting. You can bait up with a boat during the day and, providing you are not out on the water at bite time, you will not usually spook the fish.

Before each night I put in another 3kg to make sure there is plenty out there for the carp to home in on; I have found that when I have only put in a kilo or so the fish have sometimes ignored it, and then when I upped the amount the bites started again. I think the bream do still eat some 20s, so having more out there means there is always something left for the carp when they do start feeding.

Particles and pellets are allowed, but we ask that you buy them from us so we know exactly how much fish oil our carp are consuming and also that the particles are properly cooked and are of a balanced mix, i.e. not too many tigers. Last year eight tonnes

of pellets were sold by the old French owner, many anglers piled pellets on top of pellets and caught very little, and, as such, the carp were massive when they did get caught but they were carrying so much weight they rarely needed anglers' hookbaits, and so rarely came out. This year fewer pellets have been used, lots more boilies have gone in and lots more carp have been caught. Early in the season lots of carp were

“The topography of Gigantica is very flat, being 17-23ft deep all over; the changes in depth are never sudden so your baited area becomes the feature”

caught over large beds of particles and pellets, but 20-24mm hookbaits were needed to avoid the attentions of the bream. Fishing in this way is a much cheaper alternative to just boilie fishing, especially if you can't afford 20-30kg for your week's fishing.

One other major mistake people make is to thrash the water to a foam with a marker! The topography of Gigantica is very flat, being 17-23ft deep all over; the changes in depth are never sudden so your baited area becomes the feature. Pick a range

that suits you and fish all three rods on it – let them come to you. Chasing showing fish rarely gets you more than one bite, whereas big baited spots get multiple hits week after week.

We have stopped people using remote boats and also rowing out hookbaits, much to the displeasure of the boat lovers, but it has worked and worked brilliantly, no one has needed to fish more than 100yds and most carp are now caught at 50-80yds, a very comfortable range to cast to and bait up. This gives the carp a large sanctuary in the middle, but they always come back to the bait, day and night.

Rigs are very simplistic – sharp hooks with bottom baits or Snowman presentations get most bites. When using blowback-style rigs I always extend the shank with shrink tube to help the hook flip over and stay in during the fight. We have a barbless rule to help any tethered fish escape and ensure that cracked-off rigs are not lethal, so extra shrink tube at an aggressive angle keeps them in place. The Size 6 and 4 Kurv B and Wide Gape B are my personal favourites, although I have used crushed barb Long Shank Xs in Size 4 with great success.

I like a combi link with a soft section by the hook and a stiff boom – Hybrid Stiff is my choice. I fish it 8-12ins long, which is long for me considering the bottom is hard and weed-free, but this length seems to be the best on this lake. I don't know why, maybe it's because we are boilie fishing so the carp are moving faster between baits. I use either a lead clip, fished running (see pic) or a Hybrid lead clip; both are tangle-free and simple to set up. All my rig components are gravel colour because the bottom is so light. I put a lot of effort into camouflage and

Baiting with the stick to get them on the feed.



Filming the DVD, another free copy for 2010.





Pips at 41lb – one of the growers in the lake.



My first biggy from Gigantica was Discus at 44lb!

even though I have seen how murky it can be at the bottom of the lake I still make the effort because it gives me confidence.

And now back to that amazing night. We had been at the lake for two weeks making the free Korda DVD for 2010. The first week I fished in Pole Position and had 13 takes, landing 12 carp including the one I wanted, which is called Pips, at 41lb. Danny the bailiff told me I should stay put and build the area for a big 'un but I felt I should move into Co's Point after Ting Tong had 33 takes there! He had also established a baited area and it was clear more fish were out in front of him, so I went against Danny's advice and moved. He went straight into Pole just to show me what a mistake I had made. Nice, no pressure then!

The week started well and continued at a reasonable pace. I couldn't keep up with Ting Tong but I did snare a 44lb 8oz carp called Discus midweek and then the next night had Drop Tail at 55lb. This was a dream week already, then the following night it happened – I met my largest resident.

The take was slow, just like most of the big fish are, in fact it messed around a bit before rattling off, a telltale sign of a cute fish. The fight was also slow and deliberate just like the 55-pounder. Prior to banking that one I had lost the four biggest carp I had hooked at the lake over a period of four years, so every time I felt a big 'un my legs would shake violently! The carp kited right and if it kept going it could snag me in the tree-lined margin, but with some gentle persuasion I coaxed it away. It then kited left, right round into Scotties Corner. I kept my cool and gently led it back, trying to not put too much pressure on it. I had found that the harder I pulled the harder it pulled back, so by easing off I was able to lead it in. When it surfaced I knew I had another 50lb+ carp, but I genuinely didn't know it was as big as it turned out to be. I let out a massive

"Yesssssss" when it went in the net, which I think woke up some of the others.

I called Danny and told him I thought I might have The Giant. He just said, "Put it in the sling in the edge and we'll do it when it's light."

"Sod that," I said, "get round here and help me weigh it, it might be the big 'un." When he got to my swim he glanced in the net and calmly said, "Yeah it's the big 'un."

Once fully awake he almost got excited, but not quite – how big did it have to be? We weighed it in the 'lucky' Venture sling (it's the bent one that has been used for most of the big 'uns). It went 72lb on the dot! I shouted out "72" so loud that Tom came riding round from the other side.

When he arrived he said, "Did you just shout 72?"

"Oh yes, my little padawan, it's in the sling."

"Oh my God," he said!

In the morning I had to present to the cameras for the end of the DVD whilst holding 72lb of solid but slippery muscle, probably

the hardest bit to camera I have ever done, but at the same time the best. Ali Hamidi got naked and hugged me, which has scarred me for life, but he redeemed himself with some superb pictures.

It wasn't until I saw him (it's a male fish!) swim away that it really hit me that I had caught it. That's when I couldn't stop smiling, up until then it felt like a dream. What a way to end the DVD, I couldn't have written that in advance.

Since getting back people have asked me what I'll do now, and where I'll go.

"Nowhere," is the reply.

There are still at least 20 others in Gigantica that I dearly want to catch; they may not weigh as much but they are just as special.

On the last night of the trip I lost a 55+ right at the net, through bullying it because I got excited. That left a very sour taste in my mouth in spite of catching the big 'un and it has put extra fire in my belly to get back and have 'em all!

I am back for a week at the end of October and in the middle of November, because they will be even bigger by then, and because the lake has not been overbaited with literally hundreds of kilos of pellets and tiger nuts, I really do think it will fish its head off this winter. We now stay open all year round for those hardened big-fish hunters who want more room to angle and catch those carp at their biggest weights in their full winter colours.

I can't wait to see what Gigantica produces this winter, hopefully we'll see you there. One last tip – go on a diet before you go; Danny's dinners are so huge you will be straight back up to your best 'winter weight' in less than a week!

Tight lines. **DF**



The Giant at 72lb, what a result!

Bookings for Gigantica are through anglinglines.com Check out the gallery on gigantica-carp.com for more of these awesome fish!