

GILLHAMS FISHI

JON NEAFCY CHECKS OUT THE VARIED EXOTIC FISHING AVAILABLE AT STUART GILLHAM'S PLACE IN THAILAND.



The red tail catfish is a very pretty species



A nice siamese carp



Regular readers probably know me as a pike angler but may also have read of my exploits on the River Ebro for catfish, having decided to spread my fishing wings a little in recent years. A mate, Nick Peat, told me of his angling exploits at Gillhams in Thailand and I was keen to try my luck. I'd seen adverts for Gillhams in UK magazines, but it is always nice to get first hand information from someone you know who has been prior to booking a trip yourself.

After a pike fishing trip to Norfolk I attended the Brentwood angling show with Nick where the proprietor of Gillhams, the legendary Stuart Gillham, had a stand (if you haven't heard of Stuart in the angling world then I don't know where you have had your head buried). After a good chat with Stuart the trip was duly booked to coincide with my fortieth birthday, and Stuart kindly provided a discount for booking at the show. Disaster almost struck when I got trapped nerves in my

arm, preventing the movement of my lower right arm and hand for several months, but Stuart kindly permitted me to juggle the dates. In between time I was lucky enough to twist Stuart's arm into doing a slide show for the PAC region I run in south Lancashire whilst he was in the UK on business, which gave a good insight into the lake and its occupants. Stuart's talk was very well received and was something different from the usual pike angling slide shows.

We flew from Manchester to Dubai then on to Bangkok and Krabi, a total of about 15 hours flight time plus transfers (there are no direct flights from Manchester to Thailand, although there are from London Heathrow). At Krabi we were met by Stuart's son, Sean, who drove us to the resort and filled us in with more information on the fishing. The resort, the lake and not least the fish were everything I had expected and more. The surrounding scenery has to be seen to be believed and is nothing short of Jurassic Park, as indeed



A 160lb-plus Mekong catfish

NG RESORTS

ANGLERPROFILE



Name: Jon-Paul Neafcy
Age: 38
Home town: Wigan, Lancashire

Favourite venue: Wild glacial lakes and Scottish lochs

Favourite species: Pike

Most memorable catch: My first twenty (age 13), first 25lb-plus pike (age 17), first brace of twenties (age 17), my glacial lake 35lb 1oz pike, and seeing my four-year-old daughter Leah catch her first pike.

The rods are in



Playing a big fish at Gillhams – you never quite know what species it will be!



Another Mekong catfish



A 130lb-plus pirarucu

are the fish themselves. The lake and the grounds are all immaculately kept.

Fishing-wise everything was provided by Gillhams including very good quality tackle: Free Spirit rods, Shimano Big Baitrunner reels and either Whiplash Pro braid or Eustace mono, bite alarms, rod pods, etc. The trips are 'guided' and the guides themselves are first class with various angling backgrounds. The guides will do as much or as little for you as you want to suit the individual angler. Due to the size of the fish they need to remain in the water, so the one thing you 100% need a guide for is to 'land' your fish; a quick sound of a whistle provided easily summons assistance. Fish welfare at Gillhams is first and foremost, which is very good to see.

From arrival on the first

afternoon I got the rods in and managed a pirarucu (*Arapaima gigas*) and a red tail catfish the first evening, which was a great start to the trip. During the trip I managed to catch seven different big fish species (there are 48 different species in the lake) with six of the fish I caught weighing over the 100lb mark, my best being a 160lb Mekong catfish (pictured), which is the hardest fighting freshwater species in the world. The biggest Mekong catfish landed at Gillhams is 260lb, which is the IGFA world record. The lake holds bigger, up to 300lb-plus, and Gillhams has held the two previous world records for Mekong. The lake actually holds six different species over 100lb, with at least 16 known species that would break existing IGFA world records. On average a Mekong catfish would take me

about 30-45 minutes to land, but one guy took over two hours and I believe someone once took over seven hours to land one. Once you hook one of these things it's like a tug of war.

Unlike the Ebro and many other single species destinations, at Gillhams you never quite know what it will be when you get a run. I caught fish as diverse as Siamese carp to pacu (basically a big vegetarian piranha). All the fish caught were in fin-perfect immaculate condition.

In the evening or any time you want a break from the fishing, the on-site bar has a good range of drinks at reasonable prices, and both the Thai and English food is excellent. We also met some very good fellow anglers on the trip, with fishing stories flowing and new contacts made. Due to the change of timing of the trip, my younger brother Gary (generally a non-angler) decided to accompany me for a nice relaxing holiday. It was good to spend some time with Gary, as we seldom see each other back home. Incidentally, Gary enjoyed the holiday as much as I did.

As with any fishing trip, be realistic. Whilst there are monster fish to over 500lb in the lake, don't

expect to catch them first cast, first day or all day every day. Everyone I met on the trip had a great time and all caught very big fish, but as with every fishing venue not everyone will catch big fish all day every day, as that's just not fishing. As with any fishing venue, varying your tactics even slightly can bring results; one day I had seven fish of five different species, including two over 100lb, by a variation in tactics.

Everything at Gillhams was extremely well organised. Everyone is helpful and there is a definite can-do attitude. You certainly get the feeling that you arrive as a customer and leave as a friend, and many people I spoke to had holidayed there several times before. I would most certainly recommend you to experience Gillhams for yourselves, as there is only so much that can be put into words in a short article. I can't wait to have another trip!



The pacu is a kind of vegetarian piranha



The plush accommodation



The scenery is stunning