

Exclusive

Diary of a Carp Fisher

Land of the Giants

By Rob Maylin



Gillhams Lake, Krabi, Thailand







Giant Siamese carp.



Spotted soribim



Thai red tail



Another 180 plus



Black pacu



320lbs and time to go for the carp.



The trip was planned for the last week of May, and I was to take with me my eldest son Ashleigh who is now 21, my little one-year-old Max, and my wife. Stuart had kindly offered to accommodate us, and we were able to get some reasonably priced flights from a company called Dial-a-Flight, also on Stuart's recommendation. Although I had been running a series of articles on Krabi, I was absolutely gobsmacked when I first saw the venue. It is the most beautiful fishing holiday complex imaginable, and Stuart has spared no expense creating fantastic gardens at the foot of the mountains in one of the most beautiful parts of Thailand. The bungalows, very large in construction with two bedrooms in each, are fully air-conditioned with mini-bar and every mod con imaginable. The fish have been well documented in Big Carp, but I had a couple of favourites I wanted to put on the bank; the arapaima of course, from the Amazon river was a fish that I had caught once before in

Thailand on another venue, but the fish in Stuart's lake were much, much larger. My other target species was the red tailed catfish, which again I had caught before. Unfortunately on this trip I was not to catch any, other than the Thai red tails, the reason for this being that at certain times of the year the red tail catfish sheds its skin, and while they are doing this, they are virtually uncatchable. Only one red tail catfish was caught while I was at the venue for my week's fishing.

As with English species of fish, you need different tactics to catch different species. The arapaima for instance is a predator, much like a pike, so obviously you would use live or dead baits to catch this species. The Siamese carp are much more likely to fall to maize or boilies, and the various strains of catfish in there, such as the mighty Mekong, could be caught on virtually any bait, so I decided that for the first few days at least, I would try for an arapaima. Stuart said with a week's fishing I

(Above left) Cage landing net to look after the fish.

(Above right) After dinner chat with our host.

(Below) My first arapaima, almost 200lbs.

should be able to catch one. Unbelievably within five minutes of casting out, I had hooked my first fish of the session, a Julian's carp, which I have no photos of because it jumped back into the lake out of my hands before my son Ashleigh could take a picture, but it was about 25lbs. I wasn't too perturbed at the time because I thought I would catch loads of these, but never had another one all the time I was there.

Ten minutes later I was into my first arapaima, the first of nine I was to take over the next three days, with five in a day being my best day's fishing ever. Most of these fish were in the 150-180lb bracket with three of them going over 200lbs, the biggest one





World record Mekong - 180lbs.



(Above) In the weigh sling as little Max looks on. Beyond my wildest dreams.

over 300lbs, each of these taking 45 minutes to an hour to land. I thought at the time that this was the ultimate fighting machine, but I was yet to hook the mighty Mekong on my fourth day. After three days fishing for arapaima I had landed nine and lost fifteen. I know this sounds a lot, but the very nature of the way they feed by snapping at the bait means that sometimes you hook them just outside the mouth and these will almost certainly fall off during the fight, so that's why I lost so many. There are no snags in the lake as such, so letting them run and playing them out is no problem, but with a dodgy hookhold, which you get in some cases, very often they come off. However, I was well pleased with nine, and one of the 200lb'ers was bright red in colour as you will see in the pictures, and every one was spectacular in its fight and appearance. After three days fishing for them however, I decided that a change of tactics was in order. I certainly wanted to catch some of the Siamese carp in the lake, and the large black pacu that Stuart had stocked.

Over the next few days I was to take about 20 Siamese carp, with the biggest one going 65lbs, and what a fight – these things fight for their lives when you hook them. Every scale looks like a black onyx stone – an incredible fish, and certainly one of my favourites now. I also landed Thai red tail cat fish up to mid 20's, soribim, a fish that I had been misinformed the

last time I fished in Thailand that it was a leopard cat, and also one of the large black pacus, or piranhas, a gorgeous looking fish as you will see from the pictures. But the pièce de résistance, and the icing on the cake certainly came in the form of the capture of a 188lb Mekong catfish. I have got to tell you that the fight from this fish, which lasted over one and a half hours, was the hardest fight I have ever had from any freshwater fish.

All in all this was the fishing holiday of my dreams, and I cannot recommend this place highly enough. It has everything that the specialist angler who demands big fish could ever want – fantastic scenery, fantastic

Biggest of the trip by far. Thanks mate, and see you again soon.



specimens, and great company from Stuart and Sean and the rest of the guys there. A big thank you to Steve the chef, Sean and Gollock, the fishing guides, for making my stay there such a wonderful time. My wife and two sons also had a fantastic time joining me occasionally to fish, but spending most of their time either at the beach, out elephant trekking, or down in one of the many bars and restaurants in the town. Well we all had a fantastic holiday, and all I can say to you guys out there is that you've got to experience this. I cannot put it into words just how extraordinary the whole adventure is. On that note, hopefully I'll have space in next month's magazine to tell you how my fishing has been going since I returned from Thailand.

All the best. ■

