



IAN WELCH'S angling adventures

Here, in our unmissable 4-page slot, the UK's most cutting edge specialist coarse angler is the man to follow every week. Welch writes exclusively in *Angler's Mail*.

▶ SIMPLY stunning! After a long battle in and out of the water, Welch finally managed to net this huge Siamese carp which picked up his Method feeder and corn. Forget mirrors and commons – these are indeed 'the mother of all carps!'



Having a ball with hard fighting carp



TOPCATS RESORT, KOH SAMUI, THAILAND.

Situated in the Gulf of Thailand off the east coast of the Kra Isthmus Samui is an oasis of natural beauty with white sand beaches, coral reefs, blue lagoons, picturesque waterfalls, swaying coconut trees and crystal clear water. The island has a single freshwater fishery – TopCats where, amongst the 20 or so species present, are redtail, leopard, ripsaw, mekong, tiger, chaophrya and sharp-tooth catfish and Siamese, rohu and jullien's golden carp. Also present are pacu, arapaima, featherback and alligator gar.

IAN'S AIM

After an arm-aching opening with giant mekong catfish, redtails, arapaima and pacu Welch's changed tactics to target Siamese and Indian carp.

CONDITIONS

A little cloud has cooled temperatures to a more comfortable 30 degrees Celsius after a scorcher on day one.

ONCE again I opened the shutters of my houseboat early and, although it wasn't quite light, I could already make out the form of my guide, Yut, crouched in my swim mixing up groundbait – did he never sleep?

When I finally turned in last night he had just finished checking the rigs I had tied, and had then paddled out a couple of bowls of crumb and corn to pre-bait some carp spots. Now, just a few short hours later, he was already on the case again!

I had a quick shower, pulled on shorts and flip flops and started the short walk around to the peninsula swim where I had previously enjoyed a day of hectic action with a string of giant mekong catfish and a few chunky redtails.

By the time I had arrived a huge breakfast tray of fresh mango, pineapple, melon and papaya along with a triple espresso was already waiting for me – I could get used to this!

It was still very early and as yet there were no signs of fellow anglers Rick, Naughty Nigel and Bill.

Rick I knew had an early night, but I had last seen the other two at around 2am when they had unsuccessfully tried to persuade me to join them in a trip to a local club. I suspected it might be a while before I saw them again...

As far as the day ahead was

concerned I was hoping to get to grips with two new carp species – new to me at least: Siamese carp and the Indian carp or rohu.

I'd done a little prior research and also tapped heavily into Rick and Yut's extensive knowledge of both species.

The Siamese is known as the 'mother of all carps' and is indigenous to the lakes and rivers of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and southern Vietnam, where they have reached weights in excess of 200 lb. But due to the usual influences of pollution, over-fishing and impoundment, big fish in the wild are now exceptionally rare.

Rick reckoned they were similar in many respects to big commons – although far more powerful and, he reckoned, far more wily!

Yut told me a stack of popped-up corn in conjunction with a Method feeder was the going bait.

I'd brought a bag of bits and pieces over with me specifically to target the carp and was able to put together a sensible but ultra-tough rig with a Fox Arma Point SSBP size 1 to a 45 lb Armadillo shockleader hook length, with a big Method feeder.

It was the sort of gear I'd use back home for big cats, and Yut reckoned it would do the job for the Siamese – although I could be in serious bother if giant mekong moved in!

The Method mix itself was



A little over four acres in size and bursting with prime, hard-fighting fish TopCats is the original multi-species Thai commercial fishery.



The Method mix comprised groundbait and cakes mixed with bread, corn and coconut!



Big stacks of corn balanced with a piece of foam were the hook baits for the Siamese carp. I used a scaled down version for the smaller rohu.



The rohu would only feed on the shallow gravel bar and Bill joined me in targeting them with corn on light tackle.



The fights have to be experienced to be believed; here Naughty Nigel has to go in when a big mekong takes his carp bait.

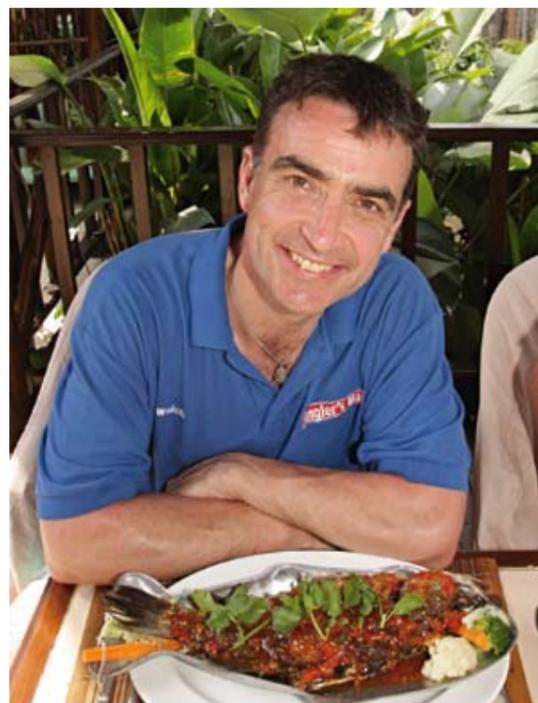


With a long fight on light gear I was convinced I had hooked a small Siamese carp – I was amazed when I saw it was, in fact, a big rohu.

“It was immediately apparent where all the power came from as the body was pure muscle and the tail as broad as my shoulders.”



Now that's what I call a Method ball! Big fish call for big balls!



For visiting Brits a full carvery Sunday lunch with all the trimmings is available... I preferred barramundi cooked Thai style.



Cheers!



Yut gives Naughty and me the thumbs up for a double hook up of Siamese and Indian carp.

VENUE information

DESCRIPTION.

TopCats is the original multi-species Amazonian predator lake on which all others were modelled. It extends for some four acres and drops off to 27 ft amidst a backdrop of mountains and rainforest. Species such as the ripsaw catfish and the carp species can be challenging, but most of the others are catchable and the local guides will get you on them.

TopCats RESORT

For full details of TopCats Resort including numerous special offers - which currently include the opportunity to bring your other half free of charge - check out www.fishinginthailand.com or call 0066 7741 5387.



» something else. Yut had put together a mix of bread, groundbait, rice meal, corn, stale sponge cakes left over from the restaurant and coconut milk. It smelled the business, although he rolled around laughing at the UK-sized ball I moulded around my feeder.

The Thai-style version he produced was the size of a football, and was dropped off by boat over the previously baited patch at a range of 40 m. I clipped on a bobbin, switched on the alarm and turned my attention to the rohu rod.

The rohu or Indian carp is a herbivore – much like a grass carp – and is distributed throughout Asia including Thailand, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and Nepal. They attain a maximum weight of around 25 lb with doubles the target size on most venues.

Given their size and nature I set up a more recognisable UK rig with a size 6 hook baited with popped-up corn on a free running lead set-up.

Yut informed me that the rohu in TopCats fed almost exclusively on the shallow gravel bar to the left of the swim, and it didn't take long to find it and get the bait in position with a scattering of corn loose feed over the top. It was an area the mekong rarely visited, so I was confident my light set-up would be able to cope.

With a little light cloud and a very gentle breeze it was much more comfortable fishing than the previous day, although temperatures were still around the 30°C mark and a few chilled Singhas were still required to keep my temperature down!

Just down from me Brit holidaymakers Dean and Stacey were setting up for the mekong again, and after a couple of hours, Rick joined me; although Bill and Naughty were still noticeable by their absence.

The first take to my right hand rod was a real belter and as I struck into a fish which took off with real speed and power I thought, at first, I'd hooked another mekong.

After a couple of minutes, however, I noted a few subtle differences in the nature of the fight. It was more deliberate, more controlled, the fish knew exactly where the weed and snags were and just had to be a Siamese.

Sure enough, after ten minutes of punishment Yut netted her and I got up close and personal with my first Siamese carp.

At around 50 lb it wasn't one of the really big fish, but it was immaculate in a suit of massive armour-plated scales, with fins tinged with vivid red.

It was immediately apparent where all the power came from as the body was pure muscle and the tail as broad as my shoulders. If only UK

carp looked this good and fought this hard I might fish for them more often!

I hardly had time to dry off when a second take brought another fish, slightly smaller than the first but just as much fun to play. They were clearly on the mark, and if the mekong didn't move in Yut reckoned we could be on for one of the better fish.

Rick generously agreed to set up a couple of rods to feed and target the mekongs and keep them away from the carp swim, but was soon cursing as he had to endure several prolonged fights with big fish.

I helped out when he had double takes and it was a morning full of action.

We topped up the swims and adjourned to the restaurant for a much needed break at lunchtime, where we were finally joined by Bill and Naughty returning from their night on the town.

As it was Sunday the entertainment featured not only a live band but also a full carvery-style Sunday roast with all the trimmings, and the boys waded into lashings of lamb, beef, pork and turkey with roast spuds, Yorkshires and veg.

For Brits like Bill and Rick living in Thailand I could just about understand it, but to me it was wrong, very wrong, and I was wondering what on earth I was going to eat when TopCats owner, Mike, walked in with a platter holding a big barramundi baked Thai style with loads of extra chilli. I could have kissed him – in fact I think I did.

Really knowing how to look after your guests is a concept many proprietors haven't fully grasped, but Mike's got it in spades!

After lunch we should have been kind to Bill and Naughty and let them get some sleep, but we were merciless and put them on the rods. They were soon in action, with the first rohu of the day showing to Naughty on my rod as I was busy playing a small Siamese on the other, then to Bill who sneakily cast his rod onto the bar when I wasn't looking – revenge he said!

Having seen a couple of small rohu I really wanted one and eventually a couple of bleeps signalled a fish and I struck into my first take off the area.

The speed and power with which the fish first took off made me think I'd hooked a small Siamese and I slackened off the clutch and gave line, but the solid power wasn't there and I soon gained control, although it was clear it wasn't small.

It took a couple of minutes to ease it towards Yut with the waiting net, and as it rolled for the first time we saw it was indeed a rohu – and a huge one at that! The fish was approaching the maximum size for the species, and like all of the fish in TopCats was scale perfect. I was thrilled.

With a few Siamese, a giant rohu and a couple of big mekong on Rick's rod, my second day had been as wonderful as my first, but there was one more surprise to come as I struck into a take on the

right hand rod late in the afternoon.

I knew straight away it was a Siamese and by the way it effortlessly stripped line and tried to bury itself under one of the houseboats moored on the far bank I knew it was a big one.

Yut looked anxious; Billy and Naughty just looked dazed, and a crowd gathered on the veranda of the restaurant to watch the extended proceedings – it was grandstand stuff!

'Take it easy, mate, it's a lump,' said Rick, but I didn't need telling and I took it very easy controlling the fish with thumb-pressure on a slightly slack clutch for extra security; especially when it got close and started to make a series of short, sharp, head-shaking lunges.

Yut had waded out up to his chest with the giant net and made no mistake, engulfing it as soon as I rolled it in front of him.

Rick shook my hand, Yut gave me a bear hug, Billy and Naughty somehow managed high fives and Mike sent me down an ice-cold Singha; it was an incredible fish and a very special moment.

Saying goodbye to Mike that evening after all of his hospitality was bad enough, but travelling back across the island was a real downer after such a high, but my spirits were raised by a lovely meal of fresh crab on the beach with Rick and his delightful partner Nim before I had to head for home.

Somehow don't think it will be long before I'm back though – fishing this good is hard to resist.