

Cruise & Fish Ireland 02

IRELAND'S Lough Derg is an amazing water and ripe for some serious angling. It is the final lake on the River Shannon system before flowing an extra 60 mile or so through Limerick and on, into the mighty Atlantic Ocean.

Derg is massive – 26 miles long and covering 32,000 acres – but absolutely choc-a-bloc with bream, roach, hybrids, pike and perch; though rarely fished because accessible to the shoreline is poor.

Those anglers with the determination and desire to tackle the lake usually hire a dinghy and engine to reach the miles of shoreline or the enticing small islands that are dotted about.

Pre-baiting is vital and the effort often attracts great shoals of fish – bream to 8lb, specimen roach weighing more than 2lb roach, along with battling hybrids that can be 4lb and more.

Stories of monster pike abound. Last summer a holiday cruiser was 'holed' and sank in 30 metres (over 90ft) of water. Divers who attended the salvage some weeks later returned terrified, reporting pike the size of crocodiles!

In another case, a sub-aqua club revealed that there were pike 'lying on the bottom like railway sleepers'.

Of course the Irish are famed for their folklore and stories; however, it doesn't surprise me for such a volume of water, nor would a bream of 15lb, roach 4lb or a 10lb perch.



Fish & Cruise

Fishing Lough Derg sounded like an adventure so I approached the cruise company with a large fleet of self-drive boats based at Banagher, Carrick-on-Shannon and Belturbet, who arranged for me to take a cruiser for a week's fishing.

It was brilliant; four cabins, three toilets, three showers, well equipped galley, lounge area and massive top deck where our tackle was kept under waterproof sheeting. Emerald Star also provide a complimentary 12ft dinghy and engine so that we could leave the cruiser in any of the dozen or so harbours then pick where to fish along the shore.

Frank Lythgoe, secretary of Warrington AA and Bill Delves, secretary of St Helens AA on Merseyside, came along to provide the fishing skills and (hopefully) plunder the lake's riches.

The lads came across on the Norfolk Line night sailing from Liverpool to Dublin, which meant they had an ensuite cabin, evening meal and breakfast in both directions, leaving them fit for a quick getaway from the Emerald Star marina at Portumna.

We ordered our bait from Irish Bait & Tackle, a Cavan based firm with a nationwide delivery service, so our order was delivered into the care of Maureen Kenny at Palmerston Stores, and was ready for collection on Saturday morning. By chance, the local angling guide David Harris works in an engineering workshop at the same location and will always help customers with fishing advice.

We picked up two gallons of red and one gallon of white, worms and groundbait. That was enough for a starter and our plan was to be at the far end of lake, tying the boat up in Killaloe, where we could walk to TJ's Tackle in the village for another supply of maggots and groundbait. And it worked a treat.

Preparing to Catch Fish

Following the recommendation of David, we headed off for Garrykennedy on the Tipperary side of the lakeit wasn't such a long way. We moored the cruiser then headed off in the small boat, using our fish-finder to search about 40 metres from the bank (casting distance) looking for a depth between 3 and 5 metres with a clear bottom, certainly nothing too rocky.

We found a likely stretch following a couple of hours probing and marked it with two 'floating markers' made from empty water bottles tied to strong line and a five ounce lead, which we dropped at the either end of our chosen spot.

Before leaving the cruiser we had prepared a groundbait mix of breadcrumb with some casters, pellets and corn. Then we simply rowed the boat from mark to mark dropping balls of feed over the side of the boat.

The original harbour at Garrykennedy was constructed 1829 but now there is a modern marina too. The place was buzzing with people, the afternoon weather was superb and we followed the small throng to the top of the marina, into the pub, where we had a bite to eat in the sunshine before going inside at 5 o'clock for a two hour music session.

It was traditional music and anyone with an instrument could simply walk into the bar and join in; so basically it was a jamming session and there were even children playing.

The Fishing

It was a 5am start on a breezy Monday morning as we set off with the dingy full of gear for our first serious fishing of the holiday, each of us with our own thoughts and expectations. Within 10 minutes we glided quietly past the end marker towards the shore.

Being the senior man, Frank decided the middle swim was the most comfortable and so plonked his platform two metres out and was fishing within minutes, in what we believe was a virgin swim from a bank that showed no sign of having been used by anglers.



He had put his gear together before setting off and used a 12ft Drennan Dream feeder rod, a Shimano Aero reel carrying 6lb Bayer main line, a 5lb hook length with a 14s Mustad long point bream hook.

It was a slow start and Frank was busy mixing his own groundbait to use in an open-ended swimfeeder when his tipped was dragged round by a battling bream estimated at 5lb.

It was a little bit of a surprise because we were expecting roach and hybrids based on reports from the past couple of years, which basically said that the bream had gone and the fishing was now basically for roach.

Fishing was relatively easy but several fish managed to snag themselves on a rocky ledge where the water became shallow, somehow managing to slip the hook.

We stopped fishing at about 11am and Frank had managed to put together a net of 25 bream that just about averaged 5lb, so it was a great start for him, while Bill and I only had that amount between us.

Then Frank announced that he had “Mojo’d” us.

He had the latest groundbait in his mix; a proprietary brand made up of 20 or more ingredients and bagged under the name Mojo. He secretly went through two bags of the stuff, mixed with breadcrumb and a bag of Bream, carrying half-a-kilo of chopped worms, a small tin of sweetcorn and a pint of hempseed.

He was so pleased with himself that he cooked a slap-up breakfast before we sailed off for another five days fishing – all in different spots – catching bream and not a single roach or hybrid. This was mid-June and it turns out that the roach were still spawning and had moved into the rivers!

Appeared in Improve Your Coarse Angling

Book your next Irish angling holiday with the specialists – 0151 342 4744

active irishangling.com