

Cruise & Fish Ireland 4

EXPLORING the Shannon-Erne Waterway on a cruiser reveals an untapped source of terrific lake, river and canal fishing that is getting better by the day.

It is 44 miles long and runs from the famous spring fishing hot-spot of Battle Bridge - close to Leitrim Village – through Keshcarrigan, Ballinamore, Ballyconnell and Belturbet.



Garadice Lough at Ballinamore

The purpose of the Shannon-Erne Waterway is to connect the River Shannon and River Erne, which in effect created a continuous waterway stretching 470 miles. Not only does it combine Ireland's two longest rivers but opens up a whole new angling wonderland that is only now starting to demonstrate its maturity.

Cruisers can be hired at Carrick-on-Shannon, Banagher and Fermanagh, and from the detailed navigation charts you simply sail off to explore what looks most interesting.

What becomes obvious straightaway is that the Waterway is not a glorified canal, but a system that also connects a series of some very well known loughs (12 altogether) that have always been rich in stocks of bream, tench, roach, rudd, hybrids, pike and perch.

Cruising makes it easy and is a nice lifestyle for a week with a couple of mates or your family, but the Waterway and the lakes are also accessible by road for anglers staying in B&Bs or holiday homes along its route.

The fish-rich lakes worth concentrating on are Lough Scur (near Keshcarrigan); St John's Lough, Kiltybardan and Garadice (near Ballinamore); Derrycassan and Coologe loughs (near Ballyconnell).

Anglers using Belturbet as their base should consider heading off on to Upper Lough Erne where there is masses of open water with tiny islands and loads of fish.

Those among us who prefer to spend the evening close to the pub than a shoal of bream can enjoy lively sport with a pole or waggler while fishing from the jetties and marina walls along the waterway, especially if you can drag yourself out of the bunk soon after first light!



Acre's Lough near Drumshanbo

However, the serious sport is going to be a mix of bream up to 5lb, tench to maybe 5lb, quality hybrids, masses of roach and some hefty pike if you want them.

To make a dent on Ireland's fish stocks you are going to need to plenty of bait and fortunately there are bait stockists in Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore, Ballyconnell and Belturbet.

All of them will have sacks of brown crumb in stock but you should pre-order any maggots, casters and worms.

Keeping maggots on board the boat can be a problem. I've had four cruising holidays and learnt the lessons the hard way so my advice is do not carry more than a couple of gallon on the boat at a time. With a little thought and planning you can pick up the maggots two or three times during the holiday even if that means using more than one bait stockist.

Pack a dozen 10 ounce sea lead weights and keep your empty water bottles to use as groundbait markers for pre-baiting.

Pre-baiting is either going to be over three days in the hope of attracting a big shoal of bream and keeping them there until you are ready to get your rewards, or a light dusting of feed by fishing a swim into the evening and again in the morning.

For the 'big hit' I suggest bulking-up the groundbait with either locally bought cheap maize meal or cattle pellets, mixing in some hemp and corn. Choose likely looking swims that can be tackled from the shore and put at least 40 balls in for each angler; do the same the next day but cut back on the maize meal and pellets by using mostly crumb and this time either dead maggots or casters with some corn and hemp.



The third day's groundbait needs to be 20 balls of brown crumb (plus some of your favourite proprietary brand groundbait, if you must) with casters, corn and chopped worms.

Make a real effort to be fishing at first light and my preference would be to chuck out with a straight bomb rather than a swimfeeder at this stage, just to see what is happening. If the session doesn't match expectations, give it another blast with the leftovers at the end of the session and go back that evening.

I do have a few quiet spots that can only be reached by boat and anyone planning to fish any of these lakes can send me an email (see above) for further details.

Angling landlubbers taking a holiday anywhere along the Shannon-Erne Waterway are welcome to fish in the marinas or from the mooring jetties along the canal but don't park your box at what is obviously the main mooring point.

There are no permits or fishing licences necessary.

Access for anglers travelling by car is excellent along the Waterway. Most guesthouses and pubs with accommodation have local fishing angling maps showing car parks and shorelines. St John's Lake is the only water from the list mentioned earlier that is unsuitable for anglers on foot.

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