

BIRCH GROVE

Lewis jumps at the chance to fish the legendary Shropshire water.

ANGLER PROFILE



LEWIS CLAYTON
 Year born: 1981
 Home town: Astbury, Cheshire
 Favourite venue: Capesthorpe Top Pool
 Favourite method: Up close and personal
 Favourite capture: First ever thirty, which happened to be off the top and just a few feet out!

Every once in a while an opportunity arises that you just can't turn down, which is how I felt when I was invited to fish Birch Grove in Shropshire, a venue steeped in angling history. I recall as an overenthusiastic teenager reading the exploits of Tim Paisley and friends, and for many years since then it has been on my wish list of waters I would one day love to fish if ever given the chance.

I'm extremely busy with work commitments with Phat Fish, but as they say, "You work to live, not live to work." With that in mind I felt it was important to take a break and refresh my head... well, that's my excuse anyway.

I was to fish Birch with a very good friend of mine, Andy. We arrived on a Sunday evening and were both keen to get going.

Although I was a guest on the water, I felt Andy was my guest as I'd invited him so I gave him choice of swims. Andy jumped in the middle swim known as the Helipad, which left two options at either end of the lake for me. I opted for the Compound swim for the first night. We'd seen very little movement in the couple of hours since we arrived and the Compound is the first swim you come to. It controls one end of the lake so seemed as good an option as any, and time was getting on. My plan prior to arriving was to try to fish different areas of the lake purely for nostalgia reasons. Although I take my angling extremely seriously, this session was more of a chill-out holiday-type trip to recharge the batteries, so I wasn't too concerned. We had until Friday morning and I was confident I'd get amongst them at some point.

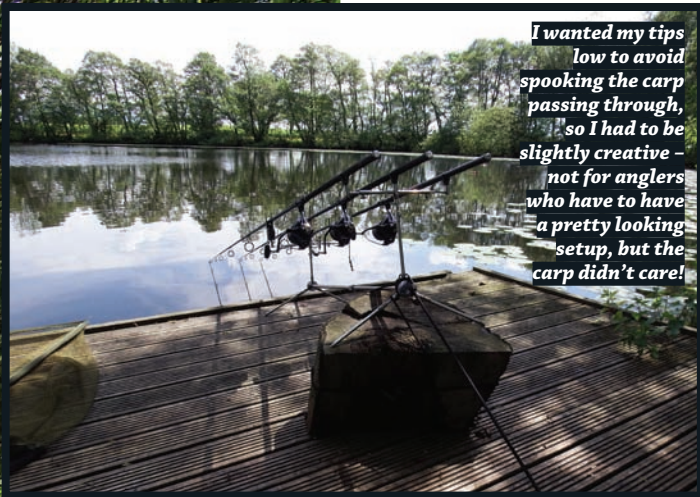
The first night slipped by

without event for me, but Andy had managed to nail two nice mid-double commons, both falling to his right-hand rod. After appreciating a stunning sunrise I was soon

hotfooting it down the bank to the Main Boards swim, to Andy's right at the far end of the lake. This swim has a huge bed of pads spanning the whole end of the lake and looks just



Tackle needed to be up to the job of dealing with the pads



I wanted my tips low to avoid spooking the carp passing through, so I had to be slightly creative – not for anglers who have to have a pretty looking setup, but the carp didn't care!

View from the Main Boards swim – just being there is enough when it looks like this



I certainly had plenty of company whilst out in the boat baiting up!

like your stereotypical estate lake, which I adore.

After a quick lead around, a few firmer spots were found amongst the soft silt. A single bright pop-up was dispatched on one rod and K-G-1 snowman rigs with bright toppers on the other two, plus little bags of S-core Bag Mix and a few crumbed K-G-1 boilies. I opted to feel my way into the session. Not knowing the water and having a number of days ahead of me, I thought I'd take it easy on the baiting and see what developed. The weather was really quite warm and sunny; certainly not ideal fishing conditions but very pleasant to sit out with a beer and catch up with Andy.

Again the first night in the Main Boards passed without event, and Andy's rods remained quiet also. It was Tuesday and by early evening my attitude of "This is a social with loads of time to catch a few" had slightly

altered to "Right, pull your finger out and start getting amongst them!"

I decided to apply a little bait; the weather had gone slightly overcast and looked much more productive for a bite or two. I spread half a kilo of K-G-1 along the edge of the pads with the stick and settled in for the night. Again no fish but I'd had a good few liners and Andy had lost a fish and landed a lovely low twenty from the far margin. Andy was using his boat to good effect and I felt he was picking up fish as they moved through his swim under the far snags.

Wednesday saw the arrival of Pip and Nigel from Angling Publications for the day, so mid-afternoon the rods came in and we all went for a drink in the local pub then Pip very kindly treated us to a Chinese, courtesy of Angling Publications, which we devoured in the lodge by the lake. Thanks, Pip, very much appreciated!

Nigel has fished Birch on many occasions over the years, so he was of course pumped for information. It appeared I was going about it the right way, but to no avail. We said goodbye to the guys and, with only two nights remaining, I decided it was time to give them some bait. We had been given permission to use the boat to bait up, so after



This lovely mid-twenty common brought a smile to my face

receiving liners the previous night over a half-kilo scattering, I decided to go for it and spread four kilos of K-G-1 along the pads with a good helping of hemp over each rod.

The weather had turned and we'd had some rain and conditions looked perfect, so I settled down for the evening full of expectation. It wasn't long before the liners started, and before I knew it I was scrambling from the bag to do battle with my first Birch Grove carp. As it slipped over the net cord, I was slightly relieved to have bagged one. Not big but a lovely upper double common. As the first signs of dawn approached I was in again. This one went over 20lb so I was in a far better mood come Thursday, but I still felt I wanted a few more and a good one to boot.

Thursday afternoon I was taken completely by surprise when my middle rod melted off, but unfortunately this one managed to bury its head in the pads and soon I was cursing my luck.

The bait had clearly done the trick so for my final night I put in the remainder of my bait; another five kilos of K-G-1 and hemp was spread along the pads. As dusk

descended I was very confident, as the water was starting to resemble a Jacuzzi. The final night I saw little sleep as I got constant action, resulting in three fish in the net; another double and two lovely twenties topped by a stunning upper twenty linear. Andy finished the week with four doubles and two nice twenties so we had both had a few, even though I'd had to work at it a bit. That's fishing, though. Wouldn't it be boring if it was easy?

A massive thank you to Pip, Jemima and Tim for inviting us to fish. We both really enjoyed it. I think Andy enjoyed the comfort of the lodge as much as the fishing, showering daily and cooking all his meals in the lodge. I prefer to rough it on the bank and spend more time fishing, but perhaps in hindsight Andy resting his swim for periods maybe paid dividends. He'd caught from the off and was steady throughout the week, whereas it wasn't until the last 48 hours that I managed to get amongst them. Still, it all came good in the end.

Birch can be booked on a weekly basis throughout the summer months for a party of anglers at a very reasonable £680. Details can be found at www.birchgrovefishing.co.uk. It is a stunning old estate lake set in beautiful surroundings and I can't wait to return.



This stunning old linear was the best fish of the session