

The nation's No.1 all-rounder comes up trumps - usually! - wherever he goes.

Photography by Mark Little

PART TWO:
**River
Ribeira de Raia,
near Mora,
Portugal**

Bizarre looking barbel with a taste for boilies

VENUE

Carp to over 40 lb can be found in the Associations Camara Municipal de Mora-run river, as well as many different types of barbel, including the giant Comizo barbel that can run to over 30 lb.

ANDY'S AIM

To catch some of the five different types of barbel resident in Portugal, and the River Ribeira de Raia contains all of them.

CONDITIONS

It's still wet and very windy, but also mild at 20 degrees on a low but rising atmospheric pressure of just below 1,000 mb.



The River Ribeira de Raia is just one of many venues that contain big barbel, along with the River Tejos and the Guadiana.



Standard carp gear with 10 lb main line and semi-fixed bolt rigs were fine, even for barbel. All of the takes were blistering runs.

LAST week I was fishing windswept Lake Alvito for carp and, while I didn't land any monsters, I had a stack of action with doubles and low twenties. But big barbel on the River Ribeira de Raia beckoned, so I headed for a nice, sheltered valley close to the quaint town of Mora, my home for a couple of nights. It was great to get out of the strong winds at last and experience even the odd period of sunshine between the torrential showers.

My guide, Phil B Rosa-Leeke, who runs a fishing holiday company in Portugal, had taken me to one of the most well-kept river venues I have ever seen. Run by the local angling association, it is a day ticket water costing the princely sum of 1 Euro a day for two rods!

The place was immaculate, with manicured banks, easy access via a road behind the swims, and well signposted directions from the town. Despite all this, the place looked as if it had hardly been fished. We drove a mile downstream and there wasn't another angler to be seen.

We headed for a known, favourable area that had produced a 20 lb-plus Comizo barbel only a couple of days before. This was caught on sweetcorn by one of the locals, while carp fishing.

Phil told me it was rare for anyone to target barbel, as most of the regulars fish for anything that comes along, usually close in on float fished corn.

I had a quick cast around to get an idea of the topography. The river was very canal-like and had almost no flow. The average depth was around two metres, with fairly steep margins and a reasonably uniform bottom. There appeared to be a few large rocks and an occasional weed bed, but the near and far margins looked the most interesting.

Phil said I would catch plenty of carp as well as barbel and, as they are not tackle or rig shy, he suggested I use standard carp outfits. With this in mind I fished 10 lb line straight through to a semi-fixed 2 oz lead and a 10 lb fluorocarbon hook link with hair-rigged maize on one rod, and a couple of 14 mm boilies on the other.

The downstream rod was close in, while the second rod was cast across to the far margins. Several pouches of maize were sprayed over both baits and then I was able to sit back and soak up the atmosphere.

What a great venue, and in complete contrast to the massive reservoir I had fished the day before. It did seem a bit strange fishing for barbel in this very canal-like water, but I was assured there were plenty of them.

This small-headed barbel was another new species for Andy. They are the second biggest barbel species in Portugal, usually less than 10 lb but potentially reaching 20 lb.





1

Every fish was immaculate and scale perfect. You have to wade through lots of modest fish, but every run could produce a big fish.



2

Andy had constant action on the river, fishing mainly double boilie over beds of maize. In just over a day and a half he landed more than 80 fish.



All of your licensing requirements are taken care of by Flap-Holidays, as well as comprehensive maps, and information about restaurants and tackle shops.



You need a decent catapult and plenty of spares to put out the big beds of maize that draw the carp and barbel into the swim.



Andy had several big doubles and low twenties, even from the river. Many felt like fish twice their size.



6

Phil B Rosa-Leeke and his father Brian enjoyed great sport next to Andy.



7

The classic shape of a Comizo barbel – they have much longer snouts than our barbel and are often caught on crayfish and small livebaits.



8

Andy found lots of good restaurants in the small villages. This was his favourite, Adega Tipica Pais das Uvas, in Vila das Frades, with its giant wine vats.

halfway out and I could see it was some sort of barbel. This was exciting because I was sure it was going to be a new species for me, whatever I had hooked.

A few minutes later I slipped the net under a pristine barbel of 7 or 8 lb. Phil identified it as a Comizo. What a wonderful looking fish! It was completely different from our own native barbel, with a very long snout and a much more rounded body. I really hoped I would bump into one of the monsters that I was told were lurking along this stretch.

A couple more carp were followed by yet another barbel species, known locally as 'small-headed barbel'. They are the second largest in Portugal and run to over 20 lb. This was a modest specimen, just short of a double-figures, but another new species for me.

Strangely, the barbel seemed to be falling to boilies rather than maize, so I changed both rods to double 14 mm boilies. It's amazing how they accepted these baits instantly, especially as Phil says they don't see many of them.

The first day came to an end all too quickly, yet it had been almost constant action, producing well over 40 fish – a mixture of carp and barbel. The carp ran to just short of 20 lb and the barbel just shy of

double-figures, but still a fantastic day's fishing.

That evening we visited one of the many great local restaurants serving traditional Portuguese recipes at very modest prices. It was unique in having rows of old terracotta wine vats, some of which were still in use. After a good night's kip I began my last day on the river, though sadly it was a short day as we had to head back to Lisbon by mid afternoon.

I fished the same swim as on the previous day and once again the action was instant. I caught some decent carp, including a few mirrors, which are said to be unusual in Portugal, and yet another species of barbel – the Steindachneri, the smallest variety in the country. That brought my tally to three out of the five or six species that live there.

It was all over far too quickly, but I will be back, as there is so much fishing and so little pressure on any of the waters.

You do have to wade through a lot of small fish to get to the big 'uns, but a big lump could come your way at any time, which makes it really exciting.

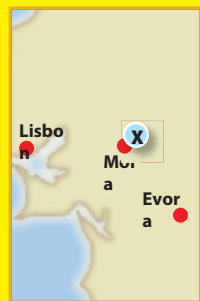
With a few more days' fishing, I reckon I could have come up trumps, but catching some different species was a very nice introduction. I'll be looking for the other varieties on my next visit.

BOOKING A TRIP

FLAP-HOLIDAYS offer tailor-made trips to suit individuals tastes, based around a self-drive car hire package, pre-booked accommodation, comprehensive maps, lots of local information about the best restaurants etc., and all your fishing licences. Deals start at around £475 per angler, per week, but you need to book your own flights. For more information contact Phil B Rosa-Leeke on 00351 925 307 224 or e-mail: enquiry@flap-holidays.com or log on to their website at www.flap-holidays.com



Phil B Rosa-Leeke



Andy's first Comizo barbel was a fantastic looking specimen of 7 lb or 8 lb. These grow to over 40 lb and are caught to over 20 lb on the River Ribeira de Raia. Comizo barbel (*Barbus comizo*) are one of at least five barbel species found in Portugal. Others are Steindachneri barbel (*Barbus steindachneri*), southern barbel (*Barbus sclateri*), small-headed barbel (*Barbus microcephalus*) and northern barbel (*Barbus bocagei*).