



TONY DAVIES-PATRICK

ISLAND TREASURES Part 1

Following his African Journey series, Tony takes a trip to the Canary Islands where, along with his pal Dave, he tackles the lakes that lie in the deep mountain valleys on the holiday isle of Gran Canaria.



The sun slowly crept over the high cliffs then sparked white and hot, evaporating the morning dew within minutes. I donned my sunglasses to cut out some of the glare reflecting off the blue-green waters. The clarity of the water in September 2010 had improved since the crazy storms of earlier in the year, but still was nowhere near the gin-clear substance needed for decent underwater filming. In the severe storms of 2010 almost every lake on the island became filled to the brim and turned a chocolate colour. Between February and March, almost 400 litres per square metre poured on the southern half of the island. Later, after my return flight to England, another 350 litres per square metre fell during the month of December alone. It was nature's own drastic way of feeding the thirst of the island following years of drought.

MAIN Our rods set up at Aborigine Lake with an amazing backdrop of mountains.

BELOW Dave cradles a spectacular heavily-scaled mirror carp from Gran Canaria.

Looking now across the sparkling waters of Aborigine and up at the clear blue sky, it seemed hard to believe that such storms could hit this magical place. The previous night had been so hot and muggy that I was forced to sleep half-naked on top of the sleeping bag. The temperature by 7.00 a.m. was already in the high-20s and would no doubt be well above 30°C, even topping 40°C by mid-afternoon. Dave and I slapped on some more suntan cream in readiness of the day's onslaught of balmy sunshine. The

columns of warm

air wafting across the seas from the African continent seemed to envelope this tiny island lost within the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean; so distant and different from the cold, dampness of the British Isles.

Aborigine Lake, combined with the connecting Upper Lake, provides a water volume of 3.2 million cubic metres and spreads across over 100 acres of virtually unfished waters. Formed by building two separate dams within a spectacular canyon, Aborigine is truly a sight to behold.

We'd picked a place to fish on the western shore beside a small bay where giant trusses of reeds curved out of the dry soil to drink from the lake's substance. It was about a 100 metres from the central dam that held back the vast volume of waters of the Upper Lake.





TOP RIGHT Dave stares down at the precipice of Upper Lake dam.

My first sight of the Upper Lake started my mind racing, for it was simply awesome to look at; giant cacti plants grew in profusion and the northern half of the entire lake was bordered by steep, rocky cliffs. Fringing most of the margins near the dam end were rows of reeds rooted in very deep water. It looked like it had never, ever been fished, and Dave nodded in agreement when I voiced my own thoughts. The lake certainly looked deep near the dam wall, and judging by the height of the cement wall, that black water plunged well over 100 metres.

We had both stood in silence, staring across the tranquil waters of the Upper Lake, until I said to him that something was bugging me. I could 'feel' the presence of big carp lurking within the depths of this wild and virgin lake...but there was

something else, a kind of presence, as if someone was looking over our shoulders. Dave said that he felt it too. He immediately recognised the eerie feeling that enveloped him, something that seemed to always fill the air when near the Upper Lake. A very close friend had died some years previously and it was this particular lake that his friend had come to love. When I mentioned that I felt that same strange feeling, Dave became agitated and tears welled up in his eyes.

"Wow...I can feel the hair rising on the back of my neck. Let's get back to the lower lake, Tony."

"It's OK, Dave, I understand what you're feeling, and I also know that it is a good spirit...the love of our lost friends lingers in the air forever. He is watching over you, mate...and maybe one day, he will see you land

a monster-sized carp from its dark depths."

"I know he is, Tony, and hopefully that premonition will one day come true!"

We both laughed hesitantly, and then Dave mirrored my smile with a big grin and twinkle in his eye. I slapped him affectionately on the back and we both walked back across the cactus-filled landscape towards the lower Aborigine canyon.

That first look at the Upper Lake had been a week ago, and now we were once again close to her shores. I had originally voiced my desire to give the Upper Lake a go, but the fact that Dave was still trying to arrange permission to fish an isolated part of the wild and shallower northern end of the lake, coupled with problems of access to the deep dam region, forced us to eventually opt to fish the lower Aborigine Lake. There were other factors which had swayed our decisions, and among these was the vital fact that Dave had actually already caught some fish from Aborigine. Not only that, but most of the carp had been very big. Amongst his catches were some amazing-looking 40lb+ mirrors and an extremely rare 50lb+ common carp! Fifties are like finding hens' teeth on the island, but to land a common carp exceeding that weight is incredible. That amazing 55lb 2oz common carp still holds the island record today.

A week previously I had flown in to Las Palmas airport and been picked up by Dave and dropped off at the Anfi Del Mar hotel at La Verga, just outside the coastal town of Puerto Rico. Lapped by luxury, with a jacuzzi in the bedroom and a balcony overlooking the ocean, I was indeed a relaxed globetrotter! However, I wasn't there to just sit getting bored beside a pool, so I spent those first few days touring the island in Dave's 4WD vehicle searching, of course, for carp lakes!

Gran Canaria is a large island situated 93 miles (150km) off the coast of West Africa. It is the second most populated island in the Canaries archipelago, which consists of seven main volcanic islands and small islets that form a chain, extending 500km across the Atlantic, with the closest island only 100km off the coast of Morocco. Gran Canaria is situated in the heart of the archipelago, along with Las Palmas and Tenerife. To the northeast lie the islands of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. To the west lie the islands of La Gomera and El Hierro.

The majority of the 84,000 population of Gran Canaria crowd inside the coastal towns, leaving most of the interior completely devoid of people. Inland, the island is filled with vast tracts of rugged mountains stretching into the clouds and steeply-sided valleys pepper-



potted with forest firs, exotic fruits, and palm trees. At one time the complete island was covered in dense forests, but this was eventually all cut down centuries ago to sustain fuel and timber during Spanish conquests. During recent decades there have been attempts to reforest parts of the mountainous terrain and, apart from the devastation caused by a massive fire that swept through the island some years ago, the work has been a success. In 2011 most of the scars of the recent devastating fires have healed and most of the interior has returned to its former glory of lush green vegetation.

The original name for this island was Tamaran, which means 'Land of the Brave' and is an apt name coined by the original Canarri tribes who colonised this rugged landscape as early as 500BC, up until the 8th century AD and well before the conquest by the Crown of Castille in the latter part of 15th century AD. The dramatic caves lived in by these early settlers still survive today, and can form a spectacular backdrop to your rod pod.

It is often overlooked that the famous Lake Chira is not the only big reservoir on Gran Canaria, and there are, in fact, 63 separate lakes dotted all across the island, the highest number of reservoirs per acre of any other small island in the world. Not only that, but most of the lakes hold populations of carp! The largest lake on the island is, in fact, the 200-acre Lake Soria which, when full, holds 12.5 million cubic metres of water. However, apart from the rare occasions such as following the severe rainstorms of 1991 and 2010, this reservoir is rarely at full capacity.

My first sight of the northern section of Lake Soria gave me goosebumps...it looks absolutely beautiful when almost full with water, and the rugged mountainous terrain is spellbinding. The route to this magical-looking water is a worthwhile trip in itself as the narrow road snakes up and over and around, until your stomach begins to wish you'd not had that curry and extra pint the night before!

The Soria dam wall is huge and looks incongruous amongst the mountain scenery, a massive white cement wall holding back millions of gallons of water. Dave had obviously seen this same sight many times before, so was not as impressed as me, but something even more impressive (at least to a Kent carper!) was the sight that met his eyes as he stopped the car

ABOVE Giant cacti plants grew in profusion. A view of the Upper Lake above Aborigine.

BOTTOM Dave with a superb mirror carp from the northwest corner of Lake Chira.

to let me take some photos and video footage. Far below us was a green mass of water, with a great percentage of the surface dappled by dimples and rings, as if it were raining heavily... except that no rain struck the lake, only the blinding rays of a midday sun.

"That looks like fish to me," I remarked to Dave, as I shuffled through my gear at the back of

the vehicle searching for the large telephoto lens, and then bayoneted it onto the camera. "Yes, it's definitely fish...in fact, I reckon they're all carp. There must be thousands of them!" I blurted out as the autofocus locked on to the distant surface of Soria.

Dave was astounded that the lake could be so packed with carp, when only a few years previous the whole reservoir had almost dried up completely during years of continued drought. Now the lake had returned to its former glory and without a doubt the original population of carp must have survived, and maybe even propagated. Obviously, the lake held a big population of small carp, but Dave had evidence of some big specimens having been landed by the few anglers who had previously fished it, so it would be worth a more serious look. The fact that large tracts of previously dry lakebed were now submerged beneath fresh waters, only added up to one thing, and that was masses of natural food for the carp to grow and get fat on nature's larder.

The biggest problem with Soria is the fact that no major roads run along the shoreline, which meant quite a trek to reach the majority of the lake. But this meant that it would remain fished very little by





carp anglers and would be a good water to try in the future.

As we drove onwards around sharp, twisting bends that hugged the contours of the mountains, another outstandingly beautiful stretch of water came into view. Cueva de Las Niñas Lake is a jewel set in the crown of Gran Canaria. With an area of 128 acres and a capacity of 5.8 million cubic metres, it is yet another large lake filled to the brim with carp. The less positive aspect of this lake is its popularity as a stopping off point for holidaymakers driving around the interior, and the fact that the majority of carp within the lake are quite small.

There has been the occasional 20lb+ carp caught from this water, but there is a profusion of single- and double-figure fish, so it is best seen as a 'runs' water for anglers on holiday wanting a bit of fun and plenty of action to the rods. Despite the fact that the parking area at the northern section of this lake can become busy with campers and swimmers during hot weekends, the vast majority of the dam area and southern section of the entire lake is almost devoid of people during most days, due to lack of road access in those areas.

There are many other reservoirs scattered across this mountainous island, such as the 49-acre Caidero de Las Niñas (not to be confused with the larger Cueva de Las Niñas), and the similar-sized neighbouring Lake Baranco de Sibberio, which was formed by damming a side stream which feeds Niñas. East of these two reservoirs is the larger 112-acre Parralillo Lake. Of the three lakes, Niñas provides the easiest access by taking a winding road east of Los Cercadillos. That same road continues to snake through mountains eastwards to reach the incredibly beautiful Parralillo, hugging



the contours of the rock faces high above the shimmering waters until it eventually crosses the lake, and then follows the northern banks of the feeder stream. The rugged terrain surrounding Parralillo prevents easy access down to the water (unless you love rock climbing or abseiling!)

so apart from the dam section, most of the lake is better covered by canoe or dinghy.

There are, of course, many other smaller lakes, such

as Lake Conda, Lake Sorreuda, Lake Saucillo, Lake Trujillo, and the evocatively-named old Dam of the Girls, which all provide options for the exploring carp angler to this beautiful island.

All these dams provide water supplies, mainly for agriculture, although during the past century during times of severe droughts, the island also receives 2,362 cubic metres of water from many deep bore wells. In an effort to avoid the costly drilling of deep wells and continued problems of some of these drying up, in recent years Gran Canaria has also been

TOP LEFT The view over the lower Aborigine Lake.

ABOVE Stunning vista. Tony looks down on the dam area of Lake Niñas.

BELOW Dave with a beautiful big Grand Canaria mirror carp.

a world pioneer in the production of advanced sewer treatment plants and seawater desalination treatment. This has provided a way forward for the often parched landscape and thirsty hotels and cities filled with millions of tourists each year.

The yellow sun continued to climb above Aborigine until it turned white hot in an azure sky. I donned my favourite camouflaged J-hat that not only shields my eyes from the blinding sun, but also has a built-in netting that allows free flow of air to my head and keeps it cool by allowing sweat to quickly evaporate. Even so, my head was still thumping, not so much from the sun, but due to lack of sleep as a result of Dave's loud snoring throughout the previous night. Not only that, but a pair of escaped cockerels had strolled into our camp area and taken up residence in the bushes behind us. There is nothing quite like being woken at 4.00 a.m. by a loudly crowing cockerel! Their constant clucking and crowing echoed off the mountain crags and set off all the other cockerels in lower valleys. This set the dogs barking, which would all be echoed back up the mountain tenfold. So by now my eyes looked like red-rimmed golf balls. I hid them behind my sunglasses and squinted at the groups of bubbles fizzing and popping at the surface only 10 metres out from my rod pod. The bubbles definitely seemed to originate from a fish, for they disappeared and soon another group of bubbles burst to the surface, only this time a few metres to the right, and then again further along the margins.

Suddenly a lump of flaying skin and fins hurled itself at the sky and then dived back through its own shadow, sending a mini tsunami wave to lap against the bank. The echoes from the carp rebounded through the mountains like church bells.

"Did you see that?"

Dave? Wake up you lazy fart!" It was a deep-bodied dark mirror, at least 40lb+, and I was sure by the sight of other streams of bubbles either side of the swirling

"THE YELLOW SUN CONTINUED TO CLIMB ABOVE ABORIGINE UNTIL IT TURNED WHITE HOT IN AN AZURE SKY"



vortexes, that that carp was not alone.

Dave had been snoozing on his bedchair and my shout abruptly stopped his loud bouts of snoring.

"Thank Christ for that, your snores sounded like a steam engine screaming through the canyon with whistle blowing! Did you see that fish? It was a decent 40; I think I'll pull in my left-hand rod and cast it in the margins. Probably too late now, but worth a chuck."

"Yeah, I saw it; nice fish."

"How the heck could you see it crashing out through your closed eyelids? The only things open were your mouth and flaring nostrils!"

Dave chuckled to himself and then rubbed the sleep from his eyes, stood up from the bedchair and stretched loudly, burped, farted, looked up at the blazing sun and clear blue sky, and then calmly remarked that it would be another hot day.

"This Kent lad has such vision and a sharp mind so early in the morning," I quietly mumbled to myself.

As if to relay the fact that Dave had missed the first leap of the carp, the same fish suddenly leapt out of the water again, re-entering its own ripples with a resounding slap of its tail. We both stared open-mouthed for a few moments, almost mesmerised by the sight of a series of swirling vortexes left in the fish's wake. Suddenly, another carp leapt further along the margins beyond Dave's rods, and then yet another rolled close to reeds in the right-hand bay.

The sight of all this activity set our hearts and minds in motion. We'd not seen a single ripple from a carp for the past two days and nights, and now on the final day the carp had chosen to show themselves. Apart from one mirror carp caught by Dave on the first night, the lake had otherwise seemed dead. Even the capture of that one carp had been a shock, for it turned out to be the smallest carp by far that Dave had ever seen in Aborigine Lake! Not quite the lump we had expected to catch in front of the video camera.

The big plus factor about waiting for carp to pull our strings at this particular venue was the totally awesome scenery that surrounded us. Just sitting back in the bedchair and taking in the spectacular views simply took your breath away. Who needed a big carp in such a beautiful setting? Well, after seeing those carp rolling in front of us, I certainly did! Preferably connected to my rod and line!

On the first day that we arrived at the lake, we had decided to fish with three rods apiece. Dave chose to fish two of his baits to the fringes of a long line of reeds and grasses that dipped their curved fronds into the margins of a big bay further along the near bank. His third rig was dropped with the aid of a remote-controlled bait boat at extreme distance near the edges of a submerged old wall close to the far bank.

I had chosen to drop two rigs tight to the entrance to a small natural bay on the opposite bank, formed by a tiny seasonal stream. This bay was filled with ancient rock falls and bordered by half-submerged pampas grasses. It just shouted out to me 'carp feed here!' when I first set eyes on it. The problem was, that for the past few nights they definitely hadn't fed on my tasty tiger nuts, but unbeknown to me, something else had certainly been chomping down on them.

I'd tried boilies during the first night at Aborigine, but true to Dave's advice that they rarely escaped the attentions of the wild terrapin and turtle populations, I soon reeled in cleaned



ABOVE Looking down on the northern arm of Lake Soria.

BELOW Dave with a 41lb mirror caught during wet conditions from Aborigine. Photo taken on his little pocket camera.

Hair Rigs, so changed all the rigs back to large tiger nuts, rowed them back out to the prime positions and sat back to wait out the hours. David continued to bait up his long-distance areas with the aid of the remote bait boat, but I still preferred to row out my rigs using the dinghy and then scattered my freebies directly over the rigs. The main bait mix was an even mixture of chopped, varied particles and pellets with a scattering of whole tigers.

I've used tiger nuts a lot at venues worldwide in the past, specifically at venues that have major problems with unwanted species, such as catfish, eating boilies, especially in locations such as South Africa. I have even hooked huge, snapping turtles over 100lb in weight using boilies intended for carp in the USA, but these occasions have been so rare during many thousands of hours' fishing, that it has not prevented me from continuing to use them. However, in Gran Canaria almost all the main lakes are now overpopulated by small terrapin and large turtle populations, making it almost impossible to avoid their attentions if you intend to use boilies for any length of time. Even on Lake Chira, where you can sometimes get away with using boilies, the situation over recent years has drastically changed and it is best to use tiger nuts to avoid the turtles stripping

your hookbait.

The first part of the week shortly after touring the island and prior to coming to Aborigine, I'd spent at Dave's luxury apartments located in a wild and private location on the banks of Lake Chira. It is a very picturesque setting on the main northern arm of the lake and is devoid of other anglers except for the customers who book week-long stays at the apartments or on day-only bookings via CarpGranCanaria.com

I chose not to actually fish during that period and opted instead to spend my time taking photographs and filming video footage for the Globetrotter Carp Quest DVD. However, on one occasion when Dave had driven a group of his day customers back across the mountains to their hotel on the coast, I couldn't resist casting out a couple of his spare rods for a few hours. It was a wonderful quiet time of the night, with the sky lit by stars and a crescent moon bobbing on the inky waters.

Before long I had a screaming run on the left-hand rod, and during a hectic battle with a 30lb+ mirror, an upper-20 decided to suck in the other rig! The larger carp was a particularly spectacular-looking fish, with a double linear line of large scales surrounded with a scattering of smaller scales over each flank. I quickly let the smaller carp go and trapped the larger, beautiful mirror inside the landing net, while I rushed off to collect a sack from Dave's tackle store situated directly



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behind the swim. Unfortunately, no amount of searching revealed the location of any carp sacks, so I sadly let the beauty go without any video footage or photos.

An hour after midnight, Dave returned and I immediately chastised him for not having any carp sacks. He'd left them back at his house on the coast! While we chatted, it was obvious by the moon's reflection swaying on the waves and numerous ripples showing everywhere, that a big shoal of carp had moved up the arm and were feeding in the muddy shallows in front of us. So there was no further discussion, we would fish on through the night. But first things first, just in case Dave caught another big beautiful beast like the one I'd just released, I wanted to sack it for filming during first light. So with a little ingenuity, we made a carp sack from a bed sheet sewn together, with extra holes for perfect two-way water flow!

The next few hours I spent filming Dave in action with some hard-fighting Chira carp, and all were quickly returned to the inky waters – except one. It was an exceptional-looking big mirror with huge scales, so into the makeshift sack it went. The bedsheets billowed out like a large parachute in the water, but amazingly it worked perfectly in this environment as a carp retention sack, due to the fact that the bulbous sides of the material kept the carp in the central

portion of the sack and prevented it from rubbing against any of the sharp rocks that litter the margins. A novel and perfect-protection carp sack! A further hour into the night, freezing mist swept down from the mountains so we retired to the welcoming warmth and comfort of the apartments. At dawn, following a short photo session, Dave released the gorgeous mirror back to the bay. It was the first and only time that I'd fished during that week.

We had yet to find a need for our newly acquired sack at Aborigine Lake, but we both secretly hoped that we'd need a use for it during this, my last night spent fishing in Gran Canaria before my flight back to UK.

The excessive heat of the day gradually eased as the sun turned bright red and sank behind the distant mountains. The noisy cockerels went back to bed, and we did too, while dusk settled like a grey blanket over us and the hum of crickets filled the evening air. Soon Dave's nostrils were blowing like a trumpet, and I lay on my bedchair swatting mosquitoes.

Dawn arrived like a hammer blow, with the sun burning my eyelids and two cockerels trumpeting their wake-up calls in my eardrums. I rolled over and tried to get some much-needed sleep, but to no avail.

Shortly after dawn, a group of big carp began to roll and hurl themselves out of the water directly

over our marginal rods. The previous evening we'd both chucked out balls of groundbait and freebies by hand in anticipation of this event. Our senses were primed, and we both found it hard to sit down, so we spent the next two hours hovering over our rods, waiting for a take. But our rod tips hardly shuddered, and not a single bleep emitted from the alarms. Finally, it was time to go, for we could wait no longer so began to reel in all our rods. To our amazement, all the rigs were empty of bait... we'd been cleaned out by the turtles, even though on previous trips the turtles had avoided eating them! No wonder we hadn't had a single take from a carp...we'd sat all night with only bare hooks! It was obvious to me that local turtle populations must have exploded since Dave's previous visits and were now eating anything within grasp of their sharp beaks.

We both began to pack away our gear and ferry it back up the steep mountain track to the parked vehicle. We'd chosen not to use bivvies or too much gear, but with all the camera bags and other equipment, including remote bait boat, heavy batteries and dinghy, it still felt like we were a pair of hard-working Tibetan mules. Finally, all the tackle was packed inside the Jeep, so we spent a final few minutes checking if we'd missed any items of tackle in the swim – when suddenly, a single big carp crashed, and then another, and another... Dave let out a sigh and I shook my head in dismay.

“I don't believe it!” remarked Dave with a stupid big grin, and I couldn't help but agree. Suddenly we both burst out laughing, and chuckled back up the mountainside.

“This calls for a beer! Let's keep walking and don't look back!”

Dave smiled at me and laughed again. “Forget those carp, Tony, they can wait for another time. I've loved your company and hope you will be able to return soon because I'm going to miss you mate!”

I smiled and echoed my friendship for Dave for I had also enjoyed his company. I slapped my own chest and then bellowed, like Arnie in *Terminator*:

“I'll be back!” **TDP**

NEXT MONTH

During the midsummer heat of 2011, Tony flies back to Gran Canaria for a second visit to top up his tan, and this time he's determined to settle the score and put in some prime-time fishing hours and filming in order to complete the new Globetrotter Wild Carp DVD and, along with Dave, manages to also gain access to an exclusive wild lake that hadn't been seriously carp fished for 20 years!

BOTTOM Tony with a long, lean, fighting machine! Caught on a misty dawn on treble tiger nut.

