

A guide to Heron lake on the Abbey complex, Picardie, France

HERON - 1. This is the first swim you come to on the Complex. It is a great one for fishing close in, which is handy as it's at the narrowest end of Heron and shares a lot of the main spots here with Peg 23 on the opposite bank! This end of the lake does get very weedy during the warmer weather, with rafts of Canadian pondweed and some tall, straggly stuff reaching out from the margins which can make getting a decent line lay a pain in the bum unless you fish with your tips right up in the air! Having said that, there is a large resident weedbed that comes up every year along the short, no fishing bank to your right and the fish just love getting up this end and hanging round underneath it! My approach in here would be to fish my left hand rod just over the back of the marginal weed up to the left, probably within 15-20yds of the bank, here you will find the marginal shelf dropping right away down to 15.5'. The resident weedbed I mentioned normally forms in 2 parts leaving a gaping big hole in the middle of it, so providing 23 was empty, my middle rod would be aimed into the mouth of this 'bay' at a range of about 45yds, you should find a depth of nearly 16' here, a nice little hole just before the bottom comes up again to between 12-14' where the weed begins in earnest. The right hand rod would be a mirror image of the left, placed as tight to the marginal weed as I could get and as far to the right as I could get it, probably at a range of 15yds max, maybe less?!

2-4. These Pegs fall into a similar bracket as their counterparts on Fox and are all very much the same, they will all have significant weed growth around the margin during the warmer months but once you're about 30+yds out, you will find a very flat, uniform lakebed with depths of 14' that reaches all the way across the lake until you reach the gully that runs down the length of the opposite bank from 20-22. There are plenty of gravel and sandy areas in this region of the lake though and by butting up tight to any weed patches here you should find some action forthcoming! A known spot in Peg 2 is found by using the giant EU flag as a marker and fishing at a range of 55-60yds out. Simply have a rod in line with the flag and place the other 2 a few feet/yards either side. 3 and 4's water is affected somewhat by what Peg 19 is up to, everybody obviously has clear swim boundaries but if 19 is fishing to the limits of theirs you are again quite limited in terms of options as this is the tightest stretch of water on the Complex! I'd fish these pegs in a similar vein to Peg 1, i.e a rod or 2 in the margins and another dead ahead at 40-70yds depending on what you fancy?!

5. DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE!

6. Another tricky one if 19 is occupied as there is a resident weedbed here and fishing over the back of it from 6 actually puts you into 19's water, it was my policy last year to 'block' 4 and 6 if anyone was in 19 at all. If you operate with the same mindset, you won't go far wrong as it'll end up spoiling not just your holiday but someone else's too if you're constantly getting lines crossed, etc while playing fish and the like!! Hopefully we'll be able to enforce the 'ruling' and save any issues for anyone! If 19 is empty then dropping baits just over the back of the weedbed is recommended, this will get you fish but the weedbed is probably the biggest and thickest you are ever likely to see, so if boats are not permitted at the time, give 6 a wide berth as it's not worth potentially damaging fish by hooking/losing them just for the sake of it!!!!

7. Funny Peg this?! Can pay to fish short, can pay to go long lol! Fish show in this area an awful lot so just keep 'em peeled and you'll know soon enough. There is a lovely gravel patch no more than 10yds off the bank in front of the small weedbed to your right though which shouldn't be ignored! Out in front it's worth fishing as tight as you can get to the weedbeds that sprout up here and there, these'll be at a range of around 60-80yds in 7-10' of water.. One thing of note, if you are going to encounter any Crays in Heron, they'll most likely be here during the Summer?!

8. Read as per 7 but with the ability to push just that little bit further out due to the lake widening as the far bank turns towards Peg 18 and the bay behind the Island. There is a big gully and 2 bars that run from 3 rod lengths off the Island back towards the point at 19 that are worth finding with a Marker rod! The depth change here is from 13' to just under 16' in the channel.

9. The one Peg that has true bragging rights to access the Island and the channel that passes in front of it! There are 2 deep holes offset at either end of the Island that need to be found without fail! I've had a lot of success by fishing 5yds left and 5yds back from the Island as well as by putting a rod into the channel directly in front of the Island (as stated, about 3 rod lengths off it) and a friend of mine had an amazing run of big fish from a deep hole he found just out to the right of the Island. The depth change here was from 15.8' to 16.9' and the patch is apparently only 4-5' across but it certainly (continually) produced the goods throughout the Winter for Remy, his list of fish from the spot was big in itself, the amazing thing was the fact all bar one went 20kg+ (44lb), the biggest was the 'Unknown' mirror at an all time high 62.05lb! If you're struggling to find that or a(nother) clear patch for your right hander then can I suggest flipping a small pva bag just out in front of the tree that borders the swim, this is a spot that has always served me well when it's a bit tricky. The depth 10yds off the tree is between 9-11' which is more than adequate to bring them in close and allow them to feel comfortable holding up there too..

10. This swim was so under-fished through 2011 that the reeds and bushes actually grew across the front of it!! It is of course open but in recent times there has been a large weedbed in residence that comes to the surface about 25yds out and continues all the way across from the point opposite to the Island and as a result it has been largely ignored!

11. What can I say, if Carlsberg did swims.... This is probably the most productive swim on Heron lake, it's far from the easiest to fish let alone fish well but it throws up biggies time after time and does the numbers too! There is so much to go at here I'm going to leave you all to make up your own minds but rods aimed at the tall tree to the left of 13 at 70-80yds, a middle rod dropped 15-20yds to the left of the point after aiming at the tall tree above the L/H side of 14 and a right hander dropped 15yds

directly off the point won't go far wrong! If there's nobody fishing in 12 the mind boggles as there's all sorts of nooks n crannies down the bank to your left!!

12. Only for the brave!! This Peg is probably the weediest on the whole Complex, it is also the shallowest part of Heron and is the place they'll be queueing up to spawn in when the time comes! It has recently produced 'Shoulders' at a weight just shy of the magical 80lb barrier and is another that throws up the bigger fish as I'm sure they feel at home tucked away beneath one of the many weedbeds that lie out in front of the swim and up tight to the reeds to your right hand side. Accessing this area is a tricky, tricky cast at best due to the overhanging trees, especially in Summer when things are in full bloom! Again I'm going to bottle it and leave you all to make up your own minds on how to fish this. It's safe to say though that I'd completely ignore it until such time as they allow the use of rowing boats again as there's no point potentially harming fish just for the sake of hooking them!!

13. Often overlooked, 13 is actually a brilliant place to intercept fish that are sneaking around the point via the deep channel to get into the finger bay and up to 14. The channel is quite wide and starts maybe 5yds off the bank out to a range of 20-25yds and rods placed at the mouth of it can wangle a serious amount of fish when conditions are right. Markers to aim at are the first and third Poplar trees along the spit of land for left and middle rods with your right aimed 10-15yds off and 15yds back from the point.

14. Either incredible or incredibly frustrating in equal measure?! IF the fish are in here, massive hits can be on the cards! The single biggest haul I witnessed at Abbey last season came when another friend, Jeroen, managed to bank 87 fish in a 10 day spell including 'Shoulders', 'Bruno' and 'White tips' within 24 hours!! Having said that, if the fish aren't present you could suffer a very boring stay, one plus point being 14's a magnificent sun-trap so at least you'll have a better tan than everyone else lol! A good starting point would be to grab your Polaroids and stand on the concrete inflow pipe up in the corner and just watch the water along the no fishing bank for an hour or so when you arrive, you'll soon know whether they're there or not?! If you see 1, there'll be more! The swim should be split into thirds.. The first third as you look out hasn't ever produced a fish to my knowledge???? The middle section is a massive gravel bar that runs from the point opposite 13 all the way up to 40yds short of the no fishing bank, the final third is the deep channel that runs from the first Poplar tree opposite, down to the point.. My suggestions would be to place a left hand rod somewhere between the inflow pipe and halfway along the no fishing bank (if the bottom has been cleaned) maybe 5-10yds off it? Your middle rod should be aimed just shy of the branches of the tall tree right in the far left hand corner of the swim where the no fishing bank meets the far one, the depth here is just over 9' and is where the channel shelves up to meet the flatter part of the bay as it swings in to your left. My right hand rod used to be aimed at either the first or third Poplar along dead opposite where you stand and was normally fished between 5-10yds off the far bank dependant on weed growth, having said that, some people faired better by dropping just a little shorter and placing their rigs where the channel started to raise up to meet the bar?! Decisions, decisions..

15. Another with what appears to be at first glance, a small area of water but another that can upset the apple cart if the fish are present! This is another belter in the Summer, fish do spawn in the corner next to the road bank between Heron and Fox and spend long periods here during the daylight hours! There are too many (small) spots to mention so it'll all depend on what you can find out in front with your Marker rod and/or Echo sounder as it can get pretty weedy. Another feature here is the sunken road that runs out to the Island from the road bank.. It's a useful border to split your water from 17's opposite but the drop off just your side of it is a handy area, relatively weed free and it goes down to 16' from the 4-8' of the road!

16. This has probably the easiest spots to reach on the lake, there is a huge gravel area right in front of the swim ranging from 15-20yds off the Island all the way back in to within 25yds of your bank! It is also an easy chuck to the Island from here although it's not quite as deep down this side of it so you can spook fish off by having lines running through the shallow water if you're too close?! To your right there will usually be a weedbed (the one I mentioned from Peg 10's brief) and baits fished in the little channels around it can also pay dividends!

17. Not a fave for me I'm afraid, see 15's brief and fish it in a similar manner is my guess?!?!

18. Love it!! The tightest swim on the lake but it again has loads of features below the surface, there's obviously the shelf at the Island's base, a few dips and humps, gravel and silt pockets and you also have access to the back of the gulley and the deep hole if nobody is in Peg 9! Markers for 18 then, left hander inline with the 3 tiny bushes to the left of Peg 7 on the far bank at a range of 40-45yds to a gravel bed. Middle rod aimed at 9 and dropped either at the same distance on to gravel or slightly longer to the deep hole off the Island and a right hander to the third small (6') bush in from the right of the Island, drop this a rod length off the Island where you should be between the Island shelf/lakebed and a small 10yd wide weedbed (that does rise to just under the surface!)

19. Everybody's favourite! Although not the most productive it's ALWAYS got a queue of bods camping to get in there! The main feature of 19 is that it's the only way the Carp can pass from one end of the lake to the other! As per 14 you can divide the area in front of you into thirds, the first third is nice and depp but doesn't ever seem to produce a fish, the middle section is always lovely and clear with no weed but again, doesn't get fished. The final third is where the big weedbed is and the majority of Anglers have their fish from! Anything fished tight to this should pay off over the course of your stay, there are other spots too, 1 rod cast long just to the right of swim 6 at a range of about 80yds can normally pick up fish as they approach the weedbed and there is also a nice gulley close in just off the point to your right, to find this, aim at 12 way off in the distance and drop it short,

no more than 25yds out.. This should put you slap bang between 2 small weedbeds that run away from the point into deeper water, this spot is only in around 6-8'.

20. Can produce huge hits of fish under the right conditions. There is a tiny little bay just to your right that holds loads of fish during the Summer months! There is a thin gulley that runs from the centre of the bay (at it's widest point) down to 22 to your left and it's well worth spending a bit of time to find it once you've set up. Left hand rod, short to the gulley in 13-14' of water, middle rod, either straight out in front at 40yds or aimed to the round bush on the bank just in front of 19 at a similar distance and your right hand rod fished into the mouth of the bay wherever you can find a clear spot!

21. See above.. Fish all your rods to the gulley or out to a small weedbed that runs up the lake at a range of 45ish yds, no need to go far here!

22. Yaaaawn.. See above again! Although if there's no one opposite in 2 or 3 and you have a bait boat it can pay to wheel 'em out to the far marginal weedbed as your line lay'll be far better than if you were in those Pegs themselves!

23. Wicked swim! Seriously under-rated this one, nearly always empty yet has all sorts to go at and seems to give up fish at any time of the year! The winds (nearly) always seem to be south westerly at Abbey and if it's blowing hard down this end, they'll be all over this Peg! Read as for Peg 1.. I'd have my left hander aimed into the 'bay' in the big weedbed along the non fishing bank, this is a nice, lazy chuck of around 40-45yds, providing no one's in 1 then my middle rod would be a small pva bag launched as far as poss to (hopefully) within 10-15yds of the far bank in line with the reeds to the left of 1 as you look at it!! Right hand rod can go in a number of places but there is a lovely, pronounced hump on a gravel area at a distance of no more than 40yds out. To find this (either cheat and use a boat n echo sounder lol) aim at the solitary tree 15yds to the left of Peg 2 and slowly inch the marker back, always checking the depth every foot or so!!!! Once again that sums the lake up. Hope this'll prove helpful to you?! Like I said before, there's no guarantees implied, intended or given but there maybe a little bit of info that you can take and use from this that'll help you out if times are hard! Tight lines..