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Jez Chalong [00:00:10] My dad many many years ago when I was 5 or 6 years old.

James Thull [00:00:16] And where would that have been?

Jez Chalong [00:00:16] Was the river Thames just outside London. Um catching little dice and then as a kid kept on fishing and been with me ever since really. I'll go out everywhere I've ever gone and always fished.

James Thull [00:00:28] What did you fish for when you were a child?

Jez Chalong [00:00:35] I started off just general freshwater fishing. Um just general coarse fishing. Um and then probably progressed to the bigger fish. But I wouldn't say I'm a carp angler. Um I've always fished traditional methods float float fishing methods for the bigger fish. Um and then also got a passion for sea angling and fishing mainly in the English Channel. Um over a Second World War wrecks basically which are artificial reefs. And then yeah anywhere I've ever gone I've always fished and tried to catch different species.

James Thull [00:01:09] Have you ever done any cold water fishing for trout or salmon?

Jez Chalong [00:01:14] Not really. Not really. No. No. Never really ventured anywhere cold. I've always gone to the warmer climes. Yeah. I prefer dressing like this then.

James Thull [00:01:23] Will you tell us a bit about your business in Thailand?

Jez Chalong [00:01:29] Um, been fishing over here for 20 odd years. Uh, various places. Um I been coming to this area for same amount of time. So it was just uh, there was a need for a fishery in this part of the island. So that was it. We decided that we'd have a go and then so two years ago we needed two years out on the 18th of November. We've been open for two years. Um the middle of June 2016 we started excavating the lake and building this. Yeah that was it.

James Thull [00:02:12] Will you tell us a little bit about the lake? Is there intake and an outtake?

Jez Chalong [00:02:18] There is an overflow. Um there's a hell of a lot of water underneath. Okay. So the water table was relatively low. This is three meters deep. But before we started this we did testing to see where the water table was. We've got a deep hole if you like over there which goes down to the water table. And whenever there's any cloudy weather on these mountains that just naturally fills up. So that gives us a source of water constant source of water. So we pump in from there. And if it's overflowing these are our pipes which go back into the same system which allows us to fill up the water a bit. We've also got a stream 300 meters behind us. If we ever need to depend on that. But generally we lose-we're about three meters deep now in the dry season and we might lose five six hundred mil. So we still get a good depth of water. And then the rains start again. You know?

James Thull [00:03:18] You say it's about roughly about 10 feet at its deepest?

Jez Chalong [00:03:21] Three meters. Yeah yeah.

James Thull [00:03:22] What sort of species do you stock in the lake?

Jez Chalong [00:03:27] Think now we've got 21 species that we are aware of that we stocked. When we first excavated we put in two and a half thousand Fry along with a couple of tons of elephant dung. And that got the whole eco system working. A lot of those fry were tilapia and they are breeding like wildfire. We got too many of them. So every time we catch them they come out. And they good to eat. So. It's not like they get wasted. And and then gradually after the after the Fry were introduced we introduced our first stock which was predominately Mekong catfish, Siamese carp, pacu, Amazon redtailed catfish. And then since then we've just added and added. And it's ongoing. We're introducing different species now. And it's it's not really a science, well there is a science to this. But It's perhaps completely different to what I'm used to back in England. Whereas you tend not to overstock lakes, here it doesn't seem to be quite so important . I'm not professing to be an expert. I've spent more time on Wikipedia in the last two years than I have done in the rest of my life. Um makes a big learning curve for an interesting one. Um, here we got three small stock ponds behind this building that we're putting in small fish feeding them on which will think the next generation if you like. And we got plans to extend this lake slightly. Just move it out that way, make it a bit bigger. So yes it's um a work in progress.

James Thull [00:05:12] What do the fish in the lake typically eat?

Jez Chalong [00:05:19] Pretty much most of these fish really anything. Um, the pacu for example I remember, the piranha family they're a frenzy in piranha. But we catch them with chicken or fish on anything. We've caught the Siamese carp we caught on chicken at the same time the predators we've caught on bread. So there's a good mix. Arapaima, the red Amazon redtail Catfish the Asian redtail catfish. Our uh predators Chao Phraya catfish is a top predator. You can actually watch them hunting. And they'll actively hunt and kill pretty much anything just for the sake of it not necessarily for food. So getting that kind of dictates what your stocking levels are and again a big learning curve. Big learning curve and I've heard of other lakes that I've taken certain species out or the numbers of certain species out because they predate it too much. So there's a big learning curve.

James Thull [00:06:17] How do you go about removing fish species from the lake? Do you have to drain the water?

Jez Chalong [00:06:23] No, as we catch them we just remove them. There'd be a major job to drain this and net it. Which is something we'd probably have to do at some stage. But.

James Thull [00:06:33] Do you stock any fish in the lake that are native to Thailand?

Jez Chalong [00:06:39] Yeah. The Chao Phraya catfish is named after the river that goes through Bangkok, the Chao Phraya, in the giant Mekong catfish is from the Mekong River which comes I believe from Lao Mekong Delta a lot of the other species are South American that have thrived in this climate. The Arapaima, Amazon redtailed catfish. So there's a balance. Probably about 50-50 native fish and fish I've introduced fish introduced in other countries. We've also got European carp which don't grow as big apparently as they do in Europe but. A lot of very pretty fish over here. Nice coloration to them. Which again close to my eyes why I used to fish. Also we're growing a lot of small ones on to introduce since. We think they'll be good sport and live tackle. And again that's that's kind of what we emphasize is uh this is fun fishing here, it's not it's not a premium lake. You

know there's a lot of Premier League lakes over here with very very big fish. Arguably we've got better catch rates if people just want to have some fun. A fish at forty kilo is still quite some fish, you know?

James Thull [00:07:58] Where do you source your fish?

Jez Chalong [00:08:04] Just outside Bangkok a place called Ratchaburi, a province called Ratchaburi is where uh all the fish traders seem to be. It's quite a uh close knit community is almost a closed shop really. It's quite difficult to get to get in. Once you are in there constantly contact you to tell you that I've got various species of fish. And it just depends what they've got at the time as to what's available. You know. There's. The only fish we can source locally really here is um the small walking catfish which is nice is looking so. Very cheap. That again keeps the numbers up for customers.

James Thull [00:08:44] Where do most of your clients come from?

Jez Chalong [00:08:50] All over, literally all over the world. It depends with the different seasons here. In the low season here we have a lot of clients from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore. Because this in Australia is their winter. As we're going into the high season now we're going to start to see more Scandinavians, Europeans, English. It really does vary. I mean in some it's like the United Nations a lot of Russians as well. Which keeps it interesting. Keeps it up as well sometimes.

James Thull [00:09:23] What is it that you love about fishing?

Jez Chalong [00:09:29] Being outside. Predominantly. Um most people might not think fish are that intelligent. You're you're trying to outwit that fish and try... Especially if it's hard to use a different tactic or a different. Fish at different depths. You know lots of different twists and turns and you win. And it's. You've won a little battle. But predominately for me it's about being outside. It's. Also I saw something on Facebook recently. Kids should be given a tackle box not an Xbox and I couldn't agree more.

James Thull [00:10:02] Do you see a lot of children fishing in Thailand?

Jez Chalong [00:10:07] Yeah it's a lot, and we try and encourage it. A lot of fathers and sons come together. It's keeping the kids interested. Say with the technology these days it's easy for them to just stare at a phone or a tablet but yeah there's a lot of youngsters coming through. Agreed. Probably most of our clients are 40 upwards. But. Yeah we still get a fair share of young youngins which is good.

James Thull [00:10:36] As a citizen of the United Kingdom are you allowed to own the land your business is on?

Jez Chalong [00:10:42] Obviously I do this with my wife. So this it's in both in both names. We actually rent or at lease the land. And from the business side of things this is if you do things properly it's not a problem. It's predominantly supposed to be 51 percent Thai run, and 49 percent. But it's all done legally through lawyers etc. work permits visas. When you do it the proper way. There aren't too many problems. The people that struggle were the ones that try to cut corners. Nothing straightforward here. But. It kind of makes it more challenging, you know? I would say the staff is probably the hardest.

James Thull [00:11:29] Keeping staff?

Jez Chalong [00:11:30] Yeah. Yeah.

James Thull [00:11:31] And I suppose they're an investment once you get somebody trained?

Jez Chalong [00:11:34] To get someone good. Yeah. But you still never know what they're going to do tomorrow. We just had a member of staff leave yesterday. Didn't say a word. Just left. And there was no ill feeling there was no animosity. Nothing. Just gone. Without any warning and so. And coming out to out season that's not easy. Thank God that's the way it is. They don't do career.

James Thull [00:11:57] Do you have any old fishing stories you would like to share?

Jez Chalong [00:12:04] Loads, loads. Fished all over Thailand literally. Met some terrific people. Caught some terrific fish all over the world. I'd say the highlight would be Guinea-Bissau on the west coast of Africa. Which I went there just before I moved to Thailand. And literally living on a desert island for a few days.

James Thull [00:12:29] What is it that you caught there?

Jez Chalong [00:12:30] That is a Bream. Which is tilapia is a red tilapia.

James Thull [00:12:37] I'm sorry, didn't mean to...

Jez Chalong [00:12:38] That's right you're in touch. I'll give you this. Yeah that was for the most diversity of fishing. That was amazing.

James Thull [00:12:47] And that was salt?

Jez Chalong [00:12:47] Yeah. Yeah. Basically, it's a big archipelago. Big sandbar. So the big boats can't get in their sights. It's just a nursery for fish. And the only people that are fishing there are the locals and haven't got a fridge so they're fishing day to day. One minute you're on shore. Next minute you're on top and next minute you're in jack. It's just amazing. So if anyone wants fishing experience; Guinea-Bissau. Definitely.

James Thull [00:13:12] Do you have any fishing destinations on your bucket list?

Jez Chalong [00:13:19] Barrier Reef I'd love to do. Andaman Islands which isn't a million miles away from here. That's apparently very very good. And. Just more. Anywhere really anywhere anywhere with a warm climate. I'm not really interested in cold climates. There's some great sea fishing out there. If you're on the right boat with the right cruise and just locally you know some good sailfish marlins to be caught off these shores and going further afield near to the Similan Islands better still. Yeah. When I get the chance to carry on you know.

James Thull [00:14:04] Over your time in Thailand have you seen any evidence of climate change or pollution?

Jez Chalong [00:14:09] Went out fishing with some good friends about four years ago. On a three day live aboard on a very very basic type boat which was an experience in itself. I mean we were fishing at night for shark and Barracuda and we couldn't fish anymore

because the sea was literally a mass of plastic. As far as you could see and that was really disappointing you know. And unfortunately here it's an education thing. People just throw plastic away all the time. You go into this shopping you buy one item you'll get two plastic bags it's just plastic everywhere here and it needs to change, it needs to change soon. It's got to change from the top. There's no point just selling the small guy down the road. It's got to be from the top. I think there is they are talking about it talking about banning plastic bags over here. So whether it happens or not we'll see. It certainly needs to happen especially this time we're in the monsoon season. It's very apparent on the beaches. You know a lot of rubbish gets washed up. But I don't think people realize quite how much is out there.

James Thull [00:15:21] What I used to be amazed with were flip flops.

Jez Chalong [00:15:23] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well we recycle ours because we use ours as bait. We actually cut the soles of flip flops down and in forms of what we call a pop up bully. And it does work. Pop up like that in the lake bed an inch or two. Because it's bouyant and the fish take that as a bait. So. We're doing our bit.

James Thull [00:15:45] What's special about fishing in Thailand?

Jez Chalong [00:15:51] It ticks all the boxes. You've got the climate. You've got big diversity of different fish. It's generally good fun that the staff you can usually have. Is. It's hard to put your finger on what makes Thailand what it is. But it does seem to tick all the boxes. It's got great night life if you want it. It's beautiful. Say natural beauty. If you want it. It's a massive fish. I mean as a small compared to what's out there. Some of the some of the species we've got some 40 kilo can be found over three metres long. So you know people wouldn't dream of catching a fish like that in Europe. So. It's hard to put your finger on exactly what it is. Thailand.

James Thull [00:16:38] Is catch and release fishing important for your business model?

Jez Chalong [00:16:44] Yeah we treat older fish as we catch them we treat them with antiseptics and just generally monitor and just make sure there's no disease. If there is we can add antibiotics to the bait so you know it sorts it out before it becomes a problem. And that's that is probably the most important thing is keeping check of the water keeping check of the fish. If the water, if the water quality is good that kind of takes care of everything you know. But that's cool about it as well. You never know whats around the corner you never know if you're gonna get a bloom of algae which would deplete the oxygen. So it, it's a constant. You know. But again interesting and interesting problem.

James Thull [00:17:27] And it's also I'm guessing it's important to like the handling of fish with wet hands. And to not take too big of a fish out of the water.

Jez Chalong [00:17:35] This one's one disappointing thing with a lot of fisheries that I've seen. I've got a boardwalk and they'll drag the fish up on a boardwalk. Photographs. Basically kick the fish back into the water. No no fish care whatsoever. Which is a bit crazy because that's your investment you these. They're not cheap. The bigger they are the more expensive they are. And some of them can be worth a lot of money. So fish care is important to us. That's why any big fish if people want photographs they're in the water. We don't actually take those fish out of the water so unless there's a problem.

James Thull [00:18:08] Is your lake a naturally sustaining environment?

Jez Chalong [00:18:14] Not really. I mean the feed we add is what we're putting in as bait. There's a lot of natural food in the water. We introduced a handful of little glass shrimp when we first stocked it. And they've just multiplied. So there's lots and lots of natural food. We've introduced these water hyacinths.

James Thull [00:18:38] It seems like you have those kind of roped off is that so that they don't spread?

Jez Chalong [00:18:41] They will take over the whole lake in no time it's all doubled in mass every five days. So yes they have to be. I mean that's a constant job going round taking them out but they're very good for the water. And not only that it segregates different areas. And they'll have a lot of natural food and then gives cover for the fish for the predators but also the juvenile fish. Again a lot of places you just see. And what we were when we first opened literally a muddy puddle. We're trying to get it as natural as we can.

James Thull [00:19:16] Have you ever introduced anything to the water that will help keep it clean?

Jez Chalong [00:19:21] There are mollusks in there. Again they will be introduced from the from the birdlife. We've pulled things out of there that we didn't put in and including different species of fish. So the birds definitely play their part. You know that they'll feed on some of the smaller fish. Yes but basically it's nature you know and again if we keep it as natural as we can. That's that's kind of where we want to be with it really.