

River Fishing Made Easy

“Getting things right on a UK river can take time, but head over to Slovenia and the fishing is far more manageable!” says Hardy & Greys Academy manager Andy Smith.

Many stillwater trout anglers are reluctant to turn their attentions to rivers. They either find the prospect of coping with flowing water a little daunting, or think that unless they can afford the sky-high charges on top venues their only rewards will be hooking fish struggling to break the 1lb barrier.

Wild fish should really be prized because, let's not forget, they have grown on naturally, not merely been introduced into the water a few days earlier. In my

opinion these fish provide real satisfaction and are what river fishing is all about.

Although I now love rivers I can understand the idea of navigating over rough terrain, slippery rocks and steep banks, and coping with overhanging bushes and trees, is a real issue. Then having to apply unfamiliar casting techniques and gaining some expertise to deliver drag-free upstream fly casting and the whole thing clearly becomes hard work.

The truth is that while your casting will be a little different, from that practised on stillwaters, and the rod-and-

line setup will be lighter, no-one should be put off because most fish will be caught at 10 yards' range or less.

When my fly fishing efforts centred on reservoirs and lakes the thought of spending the whole day in the water merely to catch a few small fish never really appealed to me at all... until I discovered river fishing in Slovenia.

The beauty of fishing in Slovenia is that you don't need to be too technical or experienced to achieve great success. When the line tightens the chances are that the fish will be large enough to test your tackle to the limit.



Expect every run, pool and rapid to hold fish and nine times out of 10 you'll find they do!

Slovenian Nymphs



Anyone who has never been to Slovenia before should be prepared for quite a surprise. The scenery is breathtaking and the water quality is the best I have ever seen, but the icing on the cake is that there's plenty of easy access to fishable water, so you really don't need to be that proficient to get a massive buzz from the whole experience. You also have mile after mile of water to go at.

It's also worth noting that the cost of travelling to Slovenia to fish is not going to break the bank and, given the frequency of budget flights, it's a trip that can easily be contained within a long weekend.

Slovenian rivers contain the lot – grayling, brown trout, rainbows, marble trout and hybrids that are a cross between marbles and browns. The smaller tributaries of the main rivers hold much of the wild population of true marble trout and these fish will only average 1lb in weight, but head for the lower stretches and there are some rod-buckling browns and amazing stocked rainbows.

Unless you are targeting the wild marble trout, most fish will be quite sizable and each season a few hybrid fish are landed at over a metre in length, heading towards the 20lb mark – but the Slovenian record stands at over 50lb!

If you stay near the town of Most na Soci, near to the Italian border, you have the Tolminka, Soca, Baca and Idrijca rivers on your doorstep, and while your first trip should always involve the use of a local guide, it really won't take you long to figure out the landscape of the Soca and Idrijca vallies and how to fish the rivers.

All the waters are fly only and are strictly monitored, although in the summer months you will come across other anglers. However, the warming thing for me is that those I have met on the banks and local bars are from all over Europe, so more often than not you can find yourself

The trout may not be huge but they are wild, like this exquisitely marked marble trout, and that's what it's all about.



“ If your intentions are to target the monster marbles and hybrids that hang around in the deep holes, you would need to pack a heavy outfit not dissimilar to what you would use for pike. ”

Stuart Minnikin takes on a very fast run, where heavy nymphs are the order of the day.



exchanging ideas and chatting with not only the local rods, but Italians, French and Germans.

One place popular with anglers is Tilnik Farm, positioned high above and overlooking the Idrijca River and only a short walk from the action. Tilnik is run by Kate and Brett Bedford, an English couple who moved out to Slovenia a few years ago and set up a lovely self-catering establishment, with a full-board option for anglers who need everything done for them. Tilnik can arrange all licences/day tickets and guides and even have a few back-up outfits should anyone break a rod on day one – and it happens!

The tackle you will need

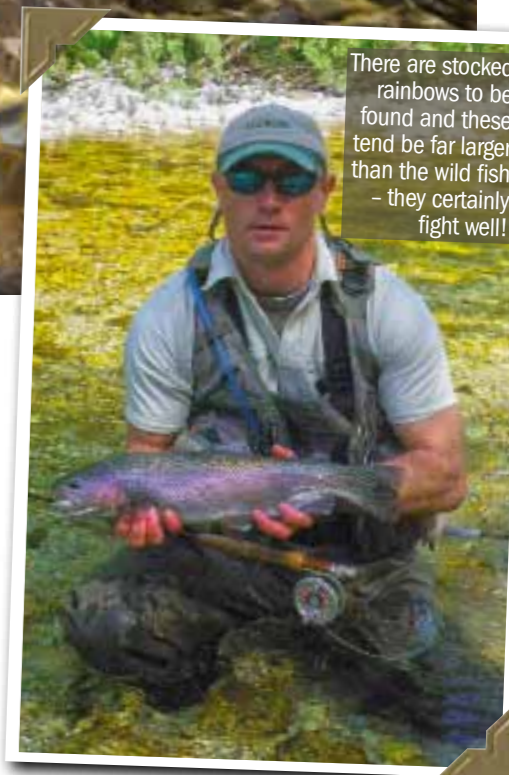
falls into three sectors. Firstly, and the most essential setup, has to be a rod of 9ft 5-wt. This will do you for just about everything, unless you are going right up onto the small tributaries after the wild marble trout. A 7ft 3-wt will be ideal to cope with the crawling about under trees and bushes (and the fish are naturally smaller).

If your intentions are to target the monster marbles and hybrids that hang around in the deep holes, you would need to pack a heavy outfit not dissimilar to what you would use for pike. The size of these fish essentially means they have become big predators feeding on other fish, and no longer have much interest in small flies.

However, the bulk of what you are aiming for will be covered by the 9ft 5-wt, a floating line and a leader setup of no more than nine feet. Some might argue that on the main river areas a 10ft rod will be better, especially if you are to employ the Czech Nymphing method.

You will need to have both fluorocarbon and copolymer leader materials, and if you are to make up your own tapered leaders then take spools of 8lb, 6lb and 4lb or even 7lb, 5lb and 3lb. It's likely you will be fishing some

extremely small flies at some point during the trip so it's no good having your usual 6lb leader. you'll need thin stuff. Don't panic thinking that the fish will break you using just 4lb or 3lb tippet, because with the lighter rod you are using you'll be fine.



There are stocked rainbows to be found and these tend to be far larger than the wild fish – they certainly fight well!



Andy Smith high sticks his flies down the fast-flowing middle current as he hunts out a grayling.

Fishing Techniques

While much can be said for the incredible success of upstream and Czech-style nymph fishing, it's not for the recent river convert. You need razor-sharp eyesight and lightning reflexes. All too often the fish takes the fly, but sadly it's often such a subtle take that the fish has spat the fly out of its mouth before the angler even realises what has occurred.

While you can go it alone a good guide will have you on the fish far quicker and may recommend that a struggling newcomer uses a sight indicator to help identify the take. Personally, I have found just as much success – often more – merely casting across the river and getting some wallopings as the fly drifts down and across. You even get takes on the dangle.

It's fair to say that in my experience, the hardest thing for the stillwater angler to understand is reading the river and knowing where and how to fish. Again, booking a guide for a day or two will soon have you up to speed.

Dry Fly

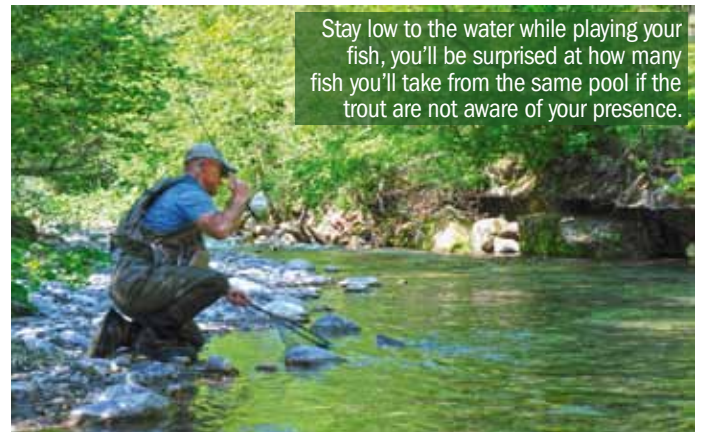
Unless you are fishing in poor conditions, there will at some point be a hatch during the

day and it's at this time that the rivers can literally boil with rising fish. Usually you will spot the odd fish rising as you work the river and, unlike on a stillwater, the rise will keep happening more or less in exactly the same place over and over again. If you are lucky you will see the trout and a cast upstream, a few feet in front of it, will usually have the fish taking your offering.

You will need to practise your casting to drop the fly well ahead of the fish to enable it to drift towards it naturally. The line and leader should land at an angle to the side of the fish with no splash, and don't let the fly drag in any way as it drifts down towards your target. A totally natural presentation is essential!

If this aspect of casting worries you at all, it's always worth an hour's tuition with a qualified instructor before you get there, but it's not as difficult as it perhaps seems as, again, you will often find you are merely casting to a fish no more than 10 yards away.

Two must-have items are waders and a wading stick. Waders can be either thigh or chest, although in my opinion breathable chest



Stay low to the water while playing your fish, you'll be surprised at how many fish you'll take from the same pool if the trout are not aware of your presence.



A wonderful fully-finned rainbow – a great example of what these magnificent rivers are capable of producing.

waders are by far the best. The majority of wading will be done in water barely knee deep, but I have been caught out once or twice walking along 'shallowish' water when suddenly I'm up to my waist! Make sure your boots are the felt or studded type and always use a wading stick to help with your balance. The flow of the rivers in this

country is seriously powerful. The one undeniable fact of such a trip – and it won't suit everyone – is that the skills learnt on a river will make you think a whole lot more about how you approach your stillwater fishing. It will improve your watercraft, skills, technique and, ultimately, your catch rate. **TFF** www.tilnikfarm.com