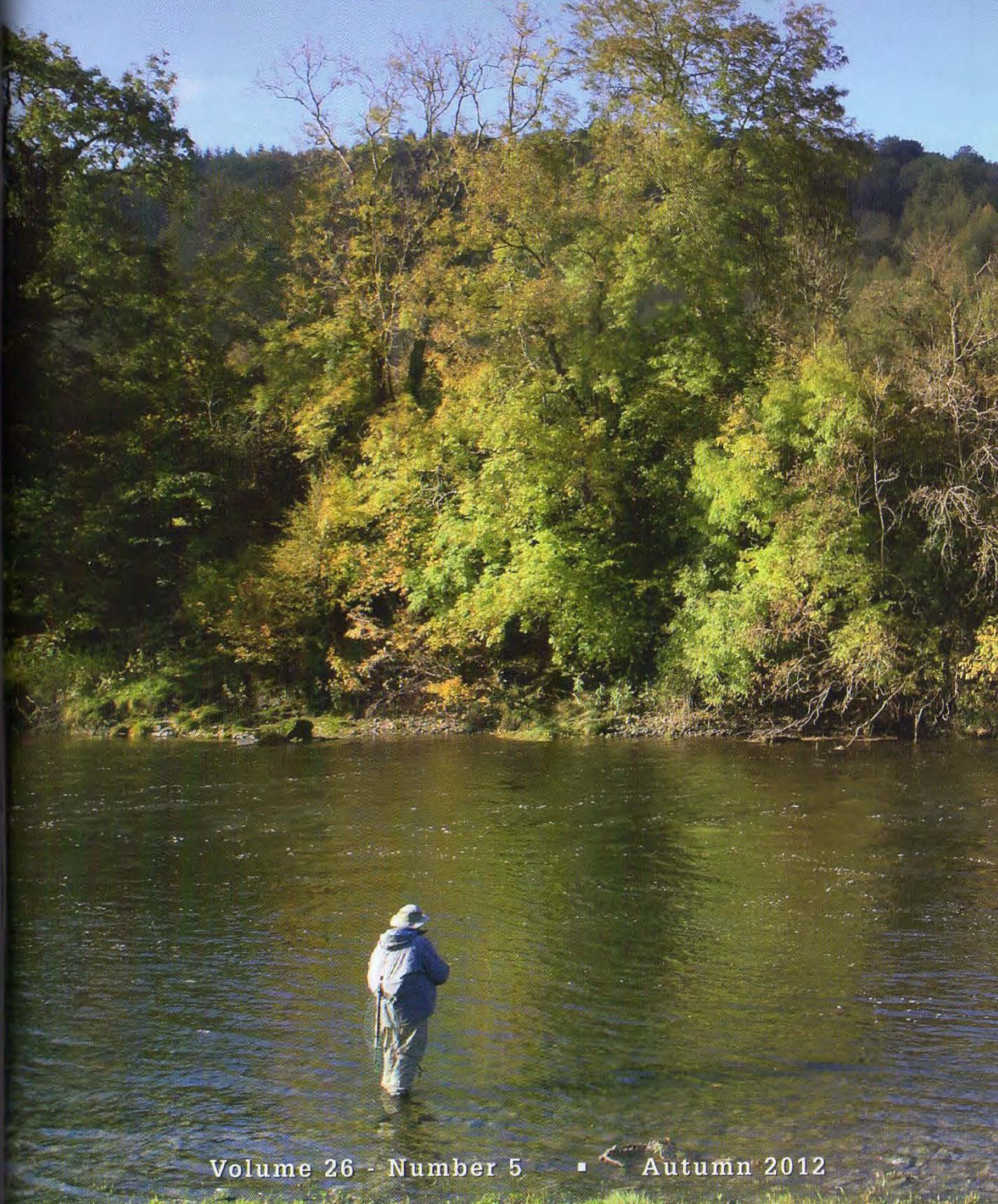


Grayling

The Journal of The Grayling Society



Volume 26 - Number 5

▪ Autumn 2012

GRAYLING THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

By Neville H Walker

Ten months ago I visited Slovenia. I had heard about the fishing potential and booked to fish with a professional guide for five days.

Rok Lustric is everything a professional guide should be and more. His knowledge of the rivers, fish, insect life and wildlife is immense. I had a fantastic trip and vowed to return.

My wife is a very keen golfer and Slovenia had some fine courses so we could enjoy our holiday together, me fishing and she golfing during the day and then enjoying the Slovenian wine and food in the evenings. In fact it was her insistence that had me e-mailing Easyjet to see what flights were available and then linking up with Rok to see when he would be available. Good news to start was that Rok was available for the last two weeks in May and Easyjet had seats available. The flight to Ljubljana takes about one and a half hours and cost less than the fuel to drive to Scotland and back, for two of us, plus golf clubs and rifle as I was going to hunt as well as fish; just two hundred and sixty four pounds.

On my first visit I had caught a number of very nice grayling on the Sora river. These grayling surprised me by acting like rainbow trout, running and leaping into the air at random. They had the standard grayling colouration. The best caught probably went a pound and a half, but were dwarfed by a fish I saw beneath the pilings of a bridge, sitting out of harm's way from nymph or dry fly.

To catch these fish the nymph or dry fly must pass dead centre of their window. I found that, unlike trout, they rarely moved far to take a

morsel in the current. To get anything close to this big grayling would have meant getting so close as to spook it, or drowning in the effort.

My first morning on my second trip, Rok collected me from my hotel and, because I was to go hunting early morning on the day following and so would have a late breakfast, he suggested we make the long run over the Vrisic Pass then



Rok showing his wading skills....



...and with a golden grayling

down to Trenta and the source of the river Soca, pronounced Socha, with a hard O. The river actually springs from a karst crevice in the rocks, below Valinka Dnina, in such quantities that before travelling many yards it is a raging torrent through some very narrow gorges. The colour is hard to describe, from one angle green from another blue, but as clear as any gin I have drunk. Our aim was to drive down the valley to Camp Klin, where it is possible to park at the confluence of the Soca and the fabulous little river, the Lepena. I fished the Lepena on my first trip, but Rok wanted me to fish the Soca as it was in pristine condition and he dearly wanted to show me the 'golden' grayling of the Soca river.

Now, I have an arthritic ankle on my right side that is a damn nuisance when wading, because I have to make sure that foot is solidly locked before moving the other, so progress is slow. In addition I have difficulty in holding station or crossing heavy or deep water.

The Soca has both in spades. The bottom varies from white gravel to rocks the size of footballs. Walking down to the junction pool Rok pointed to a fish behind a large rock and suggested I put a fly past to see what happens. The first two casts didn't quite reach where Rok

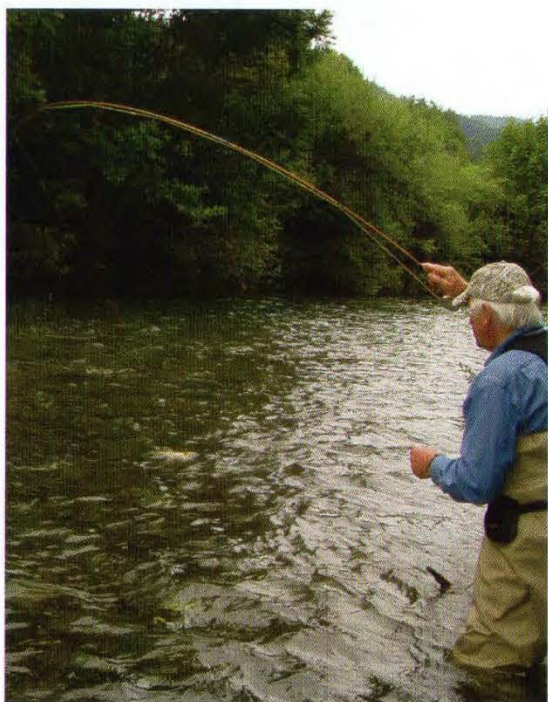
wanted the nymph, but the third was right on the button. With immediate orders to mend upstream and a "Wait, wait, wait" from Rok, my nerves where on edge. HUPPP!! From Rok and I lifted into a ten pound wild rainbow. Five minutes into my first day, where do we go from that?

Rok was pleased but his eagle eyes where searching the currents for grayling. We found a number, but my slow reactions meant none came to the net. A fair number of cheeky rainbows dived in and grabbed the nymph before it reached a number of good-looking grayling. Eventually Rok spotted a fish on the far side of the river. Now this river is almost forty yards wide at this point and some of the channels are deep and very fast.

To get to this fish we had to cross such a channel and sensibly Rok thought it foolish for me to try, even with him hanging onto me. I agreed! Rok said he would wade across and have a look. After a couple of casts I saw he was into a nice fish and he began to almost run back across the river. He wades like he walks on dry land, but he is in there every day. He played the grayling across the current to me and slipped the net under the most beautiful fish I have ever seen.



Soca grayling can jump!



Playing a good fish on the nymph

The wild rainbows in Slovenia are spectacular in their colouration, but this fish topped that off. Overall it had a glowing golden tinge and a deep rosy pinky purple colour throughout the dorsal fin. Rok told me that only in the Soca and one or two other rivers in that area do the grayling have this colouration. I could see why he so much wanted me to catch a specimen and he said that he had waded across just in the hope he could catch it and show the fish to me. The photograph, although impressive, does not capture the colours fully as they were in real life.

I continued to fish for that day but did not manage to hook one of these golden grayling, which, as I told my wife later, means I/we will have to return. I did catch grayling on other rivers and during my first visit fished on the Sora river where I was amazed by the grayling there emulating rainbow trout, running against the reel and jumping clear of the water repeatedly. I mean full blooded jumps, not just coming to the surface and splashing about. Very exciting indeed.

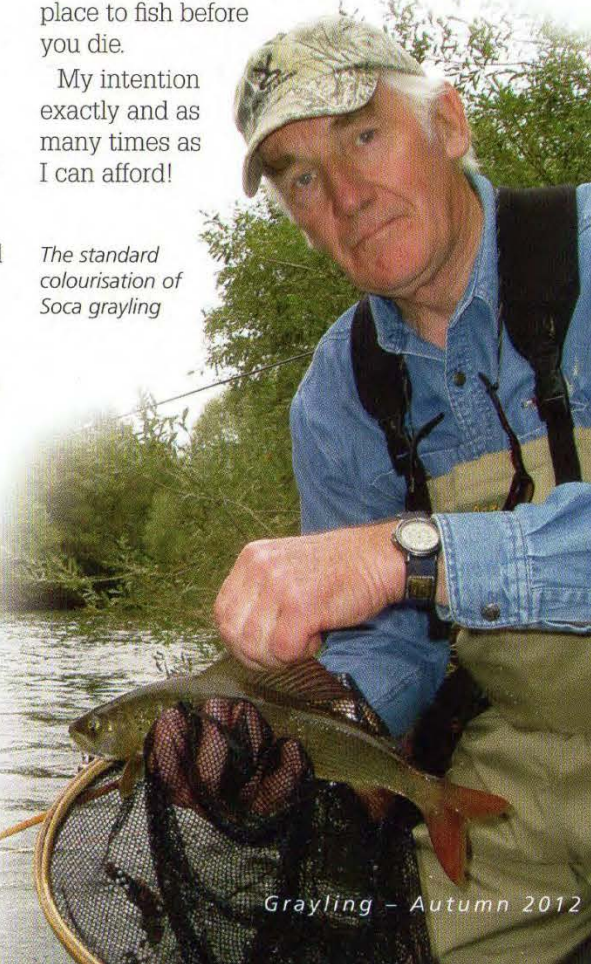
My final day fishing on this trip was on a small river running through the small town of Trzic. We did not catch grayling here, but in five hours I caught and released one hundred and sixteen rainbow and brown trout. The last eight were

all over two pounds. Rok suggested I may have cast around five hundred times with the seven foot, three weight and next morning my right arm confirmed his belief.

You can of course visit Slovenia and buy the daily fishing licence, which ranges from 30 to 50 euros a day and forage alone. To have a guide is not cheap. Rok's daily rate with transport and all the kit is close to 200 euros a day and for that you get his total undivided attention, his considerable knowledge and expertise and his unworldly ability, to not only see fish, but tell you what species they are, grayling, brown, rainbow or marble; I found him to be worth every penny. With accommodation and the airfare being so cheap, I believe the cost of the fishing balances everything out. Slovenia is the most beautiful of countries, nestling as it down at the northern tip of the Adriatic, tucked in on the southern side of the Julian Alps, bordered by Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. The cleanliness of the roadside verges and the riverbanks, made me embarrassed to be British. As they say, a place to fish before you die.

My intention exactly and as many times as I can afford!

The standard colourisation of Soca grayling



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