

# Dry fly on a Slovenian freight train

CHARLES JARDINE discovers the value of tiny dry flies on the Soca's rapid currents

There are few places I know that excite the senses as much as Slovenia. A geographic size akin to Wales, and a backdrop that seems unchanged, unhurried and deliciously wild, it's hard to imagine that it's just two hours from the UK. The combination of soaring, dense, and impossibly green forested mountain heights thrusting into the clouds, sewn together by turquoise ribbons of

river, sparkling torrents that fuel valleys still farmed with an almost medieval simplicity, is so refreshing. Then, of course, there are the fish: grayling, the reclusive marbled trout, brown trout and wild rainbows.

Amidst all the hullabaloo of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, renowned American photographer David Lambroughton and I sneaked out of Luton to spend a few days with one of Slovenia's leading guides, Rok Lustrik. Ironically, the world championships were also being staged in the country at the time we were there, so water

was a little hard-pressed, but even so, there are just so many accessible rivers it is a case of grabbing a local day-ticket and fishing ... well almost.

Along with my usual painting paraphernalia, I just happened to pack a 9ft, three-weight, floating line and waders ... well, it would have been rude not to. Rok was insistent that I need not bother with flies, but you do feel a little naked and vulnerable without favoured fly boxes; even so, I was reasonably restrained. So, off we went jetting from a welter of rain and bunting, buffeting in the high UK winds.

Pitching up at an airport in the dead black of night adds its own layer of excitement: There's no idea what the morning will bring. That is kind of fun. Four or more seasons in a day, at a guess.

I like to think I can see fish: nope. The grayling on the Soca are like trying to spot transparent smoke in gale. Far worse than bonefish. They are designed for hiding in those clear, soft, grey and tan, turquoise pebble-dashed torrents. Did I tell you about guides? You NEED a guide.

The area is inspirational. One

look at the Soca Valley, and I downed my rod and was soon flinging paint and etching lines across the sketchbook like a man possessed. This place assaults the eyes and seeps into the mind. The rivers are just so darn fishable. From great torrents of the Soca to tree-shrouded secrecy of the Baka and just

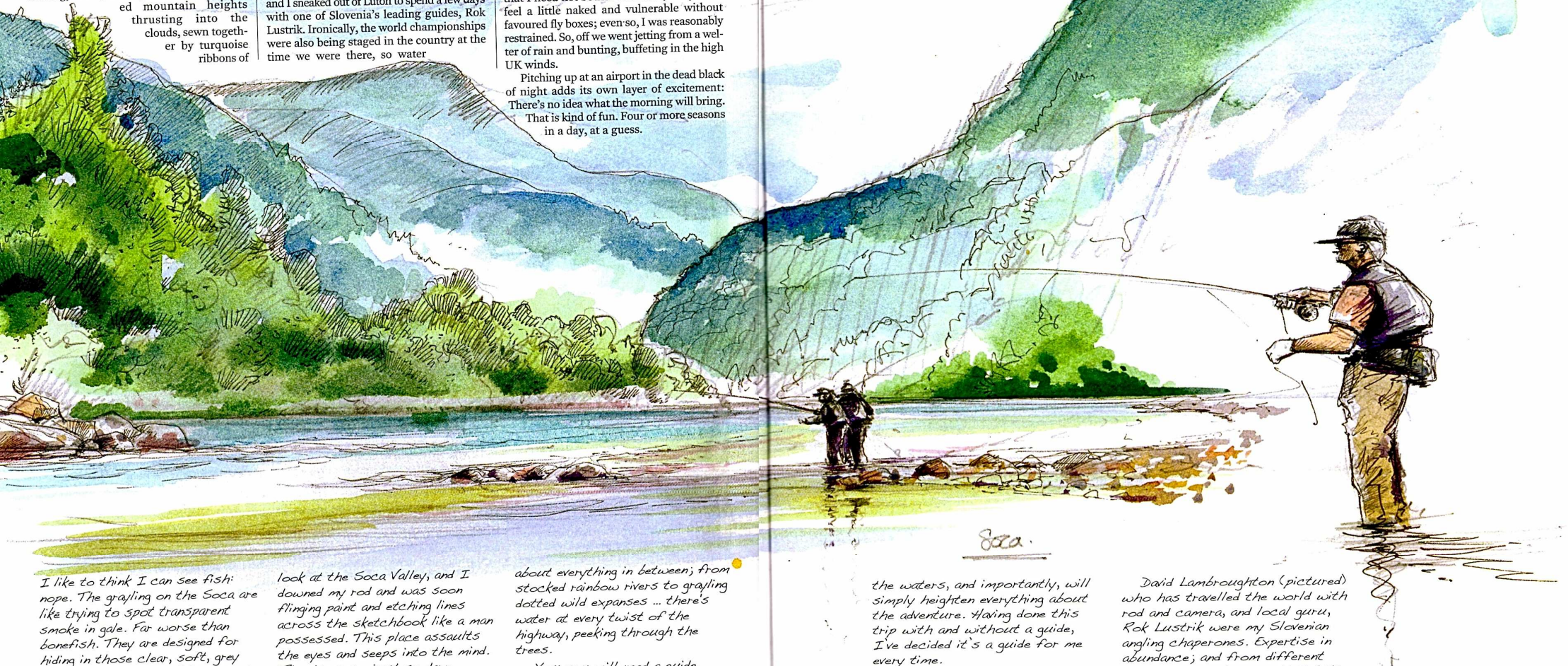
about everything in between; from stocked rainbow rivers to grayling dotted wild expanses ... there's water at every twist of the highway, peeking through the trees.

Yes: you will need a guide. Someone like Rok will elevate the experience to unforgettable. Guides know the place, they know

the waters, and importantly, will simply heighten everything about the adventure. Having done this trip with and without a guide, I've decided it's a guide for me every time.

On this trip I had two. Overload? Perhaps.

David Lambroughton (pictured) who has travelled the world with rod and camera, and local guru, Rok Lustrik were my Slovenian angling chaperones. Expertise in abundance; and from different perspectives. How could I fail?





Given that dry fly reigns supreme, as it seems to on the Soca, the approach was a little bit of a surprise. Wading is the way to go ... possibly quickly downstream in this ferocious current. You will need wading boots with really good soles with studs - don't fool with this. And some support, be it your trusty guide, or a wading staff. Once you

actually reach the fish (trust your guide to help in the currents) it really is surprising how close you can get. OK, not quite on top of them, but certainly (once you have spotted the little perishers) about two rod-lengths out. Then it is a case of casting a few feet ahead of the position and watching intently. Trying to see a size 18

dry fly in the careering train of water is tricky, though. I found it a great deal easier to watch the fish take the fly ... then you actually knew where your pattern was ... well, had been. Drag didn't seem to be as much an issue as I would have thought; but by far the best position, if you could get there, was to be directly opposite the quarry.



This is grayling country personified. Be that the Austrian side, or the Adriatic side. There is a difference. The Soca fish are designed not to be seen in that river and similarly the darker Unec and Soava strain. There are rainbows - wild ones, too. And brown trout and marbled trout. They do grow big here, 20lb+. Danubian salmon, huchen, grow bigger. But oh! The grayling.

As with any trip this was a learning curve of massive proportions. That is the nature of any trip, really: richer experiences that can then be absorbed and used on future occasions. And, apart from the grandeur of the country - and given the ease of getting there and the comparative lack of cost - I came away believing a great deal more in the dry fly as a general role when grayling fishing, not

for just brief, obvious interludes when nymphing. I also realised that lens colour of ones polarising glasses is crucial. I had my trusty brown-lensed glasses and an amber pair; not good. Here, you must have grey if you want to see your quarry. Again, proof positive that the right equipment will offer you a serious advantage.

But it was the sheer diversity of water and scenery that won

me over. Bearing in mind I have only really mentioned one river and then, only a section in around Tolmin and Kobrid. There are so many others, all with their own unique stories to tell and mysteries to unravel. And given the superbly organised guides who have a use of English that is embarrassingly good, plus the closeness of the place, an opportunity exists for even a long weekend break which is just

a little different.

Just to see the freight-train current of clear layered blue and white water is actually worth the trip; then you throw in the added elements of eager grayling, reclusive marbled trout, haunting scenery and renowned hospitality, then even Luton airport is forgiven its quirks and curious ways.



Now here is the odd thing; dry fly. Who would have thought in that vortices of water that a tiny dry fly can draw fish to the surface like metal filings to a magnet. I am not sure why, in that current speed, a fish would want zip to the surface and snaffle a tiny fragment, but thankfully they do. This is the fly that seems to hold their deepest attraction. It is reminiscent of a Muller minus a hackle and just simply looks like food.

Soca Dun

Hook: Curved, size 16-18.

Thread: 14/0 claret or olive.

Rib: Copper or flat gold Mylar.

Body: Olive dubbing.

Wing: Looped cul de canard.