

Slovenia September 2016

“Would you like a drink?”

“No thanks.”

“What? Are you ill? Here have two...”

An example of the wonderful Slovenian hospitality: which by its nature made many mornings more ‘adventurous’ than they otherwise would have been! But our hosts were always wonderful and accommodated our varying schedule without complaint.

Introduction:

Slovenia. It’s a place on the map. Next to Italy, and also Austria. Has some Mediterranean coast line, but you could run it in less distance than a marathon. It takes about 2-3 hours to drive across it, and this includes the time for many curving and slower places on the roads. Really, its not even the size of Australia’s smallest state, and with its larger neighbours, why would you visit.

Well, if you know anything about fly fishing, and you trawl the magazines, books or other paraphernalia since the Balkan wars, one location continues to be billed as a fly fishing paradise. Lots of rivers, high, clear, cold, and filled with lots of trout and other game fish. Access is relatively easy, very popular, but the fishing is also challenging. So the fishing draws you, but the people and beauty want to keep you there.

What’s the likelihood of getting there and actually being allowed to fish when accompanied by the family and/or spouse and tourist pressures when you have spent thousands just to get across the globe, travelled over 24+ hours? Not very likely; particularly if you have come from Australia. So for me, Slovenia, its waters and fish were held as a distant dream. Someday...

Then soon after moving to the UK, and introductions to the fishing club... *“did I hear you correctly, there is a tour going in September? There must be a few going, are there any vacancies? What’s the cost? Who cares, there are no long haul international flights involved, I’m in!”*

Now to break the news to the family; *“So sorry, but work is requesting that I travel to Slovenia for a week. ...”*

“So why are you packing your fly fishing gear...” you know how it goes, sometimes it’s tough, but somebody has to do it. To be honest, when I found out that there was vacancies, I was in shock, but really, life is about taking opportunities, and I didn’t know when this may present itself again, so I’m in.

Planning

Well, really this was me just paying the instalments, and buying more gear. Kit bag to Slovenia, packed like I was backcountry fishing in NZ, double up on everything. Too many times to count when a broken rod, reel, line, waders Ruined a good fishing day. The other guys laughed, and wore the same clothes under waders day 1 through 4; but on day 2, one of the guys waders were shredded, the seams blew! Then by day 2, in 36 degrees, the smell emanating from the clothes required them to try to find a way to clean and dry their gear quickly. My ‘over-packing’ was becoming a welcome respite to the broken gear issues.

Arrival: Our Hosts

Pri Marku, a working farm stay next to a 13th century church. Backed by a long hill with some memorials or other attached to the hillside. Note one, in 30+ degrees, don’t try hiking in jeans. What set out as a nice stroll round the church, turned into a march up the tracks and cycle trails through the bush and back, as something else needed to be seen, the view from the hill just had to be made. Great views, great forest and an amazing church! Its bells ring every quarter of an hour from 6am to 10pm, with extra-long sermons at 8am and 8pm for the faithful. Well, no need to set an alarm then!

Rok Luskic guided us for most of the week, less when there was filming to be done, car repairs (you should have seen Si’s speed change of a tyre, pit crew vacancy anyone?) or a conservation meeting. But he didn’t leave us in the lurch; always supportive and accommodating, despite personally being exhausted from long days and stress. Very memorable, and knows his job.

It is always interesting meeting fishing guides and their vehicles. They fall into one of two categories, immaculate or practical. Most immaculate vehicles are either brand new, and you are lucky enough to be the first to ride in them, or, in my experience, primarily belong to saltwater guides required to tow boats, thus they keep them clean each night to get rid of the salt, whilst the boat is also the place to carry gear. The others are practical; serving the purpose, as the guide knows that waders and mud covered lugs (like us) will be in and out of them throughout the day, day in, day out, for the season. They focus on getting you from one place to the next (doing it in safety and/or with working brakes may, or may not be a consideration, depending upon your guide). But what is always in evidence is the flies, posted into the trimming, sitting on the dash, spilt in the trunk, on the seats and sometimes the seat belts. If you don't know what fly to carry or tie on, grab one of these as a guide. No matter where you are in the world you feel comfortable and know that your within the fishing fraternity, US, Europe, Australia or New Zealand. Rok's car was in the later, comfortable, purposeful, but fit like a well-loved loafer. Just what we needed.

The hosts of our accommodation were equally welcoming, with comfortable accommodation and more than enough food each evening to feed twice our number. Simon, in particular liked to talk, and would join us for a drink most evenings, whether we wanted a drink or not was irrelevant. Of note for future visits:

When the host says "Would you like a Grappa?" it's a statement, not a question. To reply "no" only results in you receiving two, so grit your teeth and down the hatch.

More than happy to, and can't wait to go back, comfortable, affordable, and generally quiet (except for those bells every 15 minutes, but they became background noise during the day). The other guests were amicable, and I'm sure we will all remember the 'West' German and his pointed views on the German Chancellor, it became the catch cry for the tour.

The water.

There is always a danger in finally arriving at a long yearned for location. The time spent reading, researching and growing expectations often set conditions that are impossible to achieve, or meet. Would this be the same? The timing was questionable, being the end of the season, the water really low and the weather really hot. Would the fish be on? Was it hyperbole?

Wow! This is what I have missed since leaving Australia! Rivers, walking, stalking fish, good fish too, different holes, difficult fishing. This takes nothing away from the technicality or finesse of stillwater fishing, maybe I'm just not that good at it! Anyway, this river walking and stalking was what I found in fishing back in Australia. Covering kilometres of water, fishing likely pockets, runs, riffles and holes and then being caught up in the exhilaration of that moment when two worlds meet. The meeting of our air breathing world, and all that we can see, and that largely unseen and surprising water breathing world that flows through our lands, and seemingly, through our very souls. (Warning, marine biologist may be nearby!)

Generally though, the spectacular rivers reminded me of fishing in NZ. But NZ never had the ease of access to bankside lunches, nor three countries... Whilst the similarities started there, that's where they ended. NZ is known for its Browns and Rainbows, with some salmon. Here it was marble trout, rainbows, grayling and whitefish; we didn't see any Arctic Char/Brook Trout although they are in some of the other rivers and get large.

The weather

Really, the only way to describe it was HOT! 34 Degrees on most days and humid. When this weather meets with flowing water in the 3-5 degree range, or less, it creates a fantastic microcosm, with some river valleys tucked behind the mountain range that leads to the Mediterranean altering the climate immediately, with air temperatures on the river in the high teens or less. Here the water in the air condenses, creating a hanging mist on the water that only served to aid in catching fish, and keeping us cool. But not always, such as on the lower Soca; then the ability to wade through the water brought relief and an ability to focus, and even the odd swim.

Day one – Monday, 12 September 2016

Rok had other commitments on the Monday, but he knows all the guides and who to use, so put us on the water with Luka. Luka was energetic, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. I'm sure this was a bit of a 'try, see and report back' as to how we could or could not fish, read the water, cast and generally get around, as the plan was one guide between three fisherman; so how independent could we be? Luka took us to a water where the river was tight, and almost urban in places, it really was, but it was packed with fish, rainbows and grayling.

The fish were fast and the lines short, I felt over gunned with a five weight, and would have loved to be using my six foot 3, or nine foot 4 weight; but we had come to chase other fish later in the week, so a five weight it was.

The fish came fast, struck quickly and required you to keep a tight line. They fell to a mix of nymphs, mostly hare and coppers, but then there came a little rise, most were less than 20cm, with an odd grayling or two, but great to get out the cobwebs, feel a bit of confidence and build up for the day. And bang it was on for small caddis type moths. We fished through the morning, then were driven to a new stretch, where a series of small overflowing dams had the fish stacked up.

Simon and I watched Rob cast to and hook some great fish, and spook many others; and here the similarity to New Zealand ends, the fish spooked, rest it half an hour and they're back! A little more wary, but able to be targeted. Luka ducked off to get some lunch and we fished on! I walked upriver through stretches that were so overgrown I couldn't stand up, and the water was only ankle deep... but there was a small hole under that root system, a bow and arrow cast, or side arm, weighted nymph, and bang on again. The size and aggression of the fish amazing.

We all reassembled, grabbed some lunch and then, drove upriver again to what was a mix of industrial and forest terrain. Again the fish were everywhere, and with leaders no more than 6 feet, and not much more out the rod tip, the fishing was on. We had given up counting, photos suggested that

we had caught at least 20-30 each, and then we stopped taking pictures as well. And finally, we reached the fish's limit, a large dam, about 30 meters tall that prevented any further migration. But here a deep pool was stacked with black logs, no these were large fish, 6-10 pounds and they were everywhere, about 30 of them, and in between were loads of 2-3 pounders. Rob had been guided here, and had caught 4 fish, all excellent condition and then 'offered' up the pool. Really, any chance of catching something had to be done and dead. Off to the left was a large school that were mooching, but no some fish were still feeding; remember, 30 minutes and its back on.

Well, I wish I could say the selection of the fly was inspired, but hunting through the box, Luka selected and early and poorly tied white humpy^[b1]. His criteria, it was bushy and big, and would get sunk by the waterfall. *"This will work."* Awesome, what was it imitating, a large moth, a small spider? *"It should look like a big chunk of bread washing down from the construction crews upriver."* *"Ooh."*

But who cares, I'm not a purist, and sure enough, the best fish of the day came, smashed the 'fly/bread' imitation and it was on. Not the biggest fish, it pushed that one aside to grab the hook, and then it took me on a dance around the pool, now well and truly spooked, before a spectacular netting from Luka as it leapt clear of the water, some photos and then back again.

Time to call it quits, return to the hotel, and be positively laden with food and grappa before turning in.

Day Two – Tuesday, 13 September 2016

An interesting observation about fishing in Slovenia is finding out who owns all the fishing rights, held by clubs, and then where to collect the permits. Thus each day began with us visiting a pub, café or other establishment to pick up the necessary document; and it was checked, for me only 10 minutes after getting on the water of the Soca, each day!

This was a miraculous climb over the mountain pass at Vrsic, which was constructed by the Russian PWs during the First World War. The view was spectacular and the camera whirred incessantly at the spectacular view (note to self, ensure you recharge the battery every night, as after fish two it died).

So we hit the water I had only seen in films and photos. The upper Soca! It was cold and crystal clear. Rok had gotten his debrief on our skills, but we all set off, and sure enough we were seeing fish within 50 metres of hitting the river. They weren't closely grouped, but there in ones or twos. Easy to see high up, but at river level, almost impossible.

The water was freezing, about 4-5 degrees, but there were also people swimming in it! Simon was first up, with Rob going downriver, whilst I waited and took some photos. Rok had seen a fish, Simon cast, hooked it, and it was on... and then off. But Simon got back into it with a grayling straight afterwards.

So now it was my turn, Rok and I trekked upriver and he saw the fish, I must confess he was saying there it is, but I had no idea. Turns out we were both looking at different things. He had spotted a large grayling, but I had seen the 4lb marble trout rise in front of it. So with a stonefly imitation I cast, the grayling spooked from the line, Rok sighed, I struck and then we were in! The fish made a good account of itself and then we were able to get it to the net, only 4lb tippet as the water was crystal clear, with the deeper holes a majestic pale blue. I was ecstatic, as was Rok, but he wasn't sure if it had been 'beginners' luck. So after some great photos (where are they Rok?) the fish was released and we set off a little further.

Now we could both see the same fish, this time it was a grayling and we were in again. Here the camera died, but the backup was going strong. So now I had a grayling of about 2-3 pounds and a marble. Rok left me to my fishing and wandered off to find out how Rob and Simon were doing. Both doing fair, but not into the marble yet.

I kept fishing then to find the some grayling rising to a dry fly, 2 more, had to asked some prospective swimmers not to swim in the hole I was fishing, and then caught two lovely but small rainbows (only 3 pounds each). So it was a Soca slam! And all taken on the dry fly.

Simon had bypassed me and continued upriver with Rok, they had caught a few fish, but turns out Simon had lost a monster of a rainbow, a true double digit fish, possibly even 15 pounds, it ran him around a rock and snapped the upgraded 10lb tippet.

We discussed this, and then he invited me to have a look, I was going to go to the gorge area ahead of us, similar to the high rock areas on the upper Eucumbene, below the diggings, as I walked past the bathers and those sunning themselves and saw a rise.

OK, time to have a go. No pressure, just a heap of tourists now watching an overdressed Australian looking like a fat heron in the water! The rise again, cast and rise, pause, strike and bang, another nice marble trout. Some photos, answer a lot of questions, release. Ok switch to a nymph, another fish was above that one. Cast, mend, lead and strike! Another one, this time a fine rainbow. Surely this is a dream. Rok turns up as I'm releasing the fish and I look left and there is a log, turns out it's not a log, but the fish that Simon lost, mooching in the current. Got to have a go, I've only seen fish that big in photos or on a wall! It's not interested, the fly and several others pass by, but it is still sulking and slowly moves off. Even so, I then cast to the head of the pool with the copper john, the indicator dips, I strike and it's my second 6-7 pound rainbow in two days, but this one has an entire pool, with swimmers to negotiate, thankfully it too slides into the net after a dash about 80 meters downriver.

I have a look at the 'gorge' where the thrill seekers are jumping from 5 – 8 meters into the water. There are fish there, but no way to get to them, avoid the swimmers and then land them without going in. But it's hard not to want to give it a go; these fish are bold, not worried by the swimmers, and big!

Either way, we call it lunch, have a great feed at the local restaurant, grab a couple of beers, and then head to the Sava Dolinka. Here the atmosphere is misty, and close, and the fish well-conditioned but not more than 3 pounds; not that I saw any. After the others have not had too much success on the Soca, a chance to restore some confidence; whilst all I saw was a progression of white water kayakers, I stopped counting at 63, and nude bathers, resting and cooling off after hiking the nearby mountains; it is Europe after all! The hardest part was not just grabbing a beer from the stacks cooling in the river and just sitting back and soaking it all in.

Day Three – Wednesday, 14 September 2016 – Idrija and Lower Soca

Rok had an early meeting regarding the conservation plan for the rivers, access rights and the continual proposal to dam all these for hydro-power. However, he did not leave us alone, and we stepped off early with another guide who dropped us on the Idrija; a lovely low flowing but wide river for us to fish independently. We split the rivers into 'beats' and set off together surrounded by a magnificent vista, and 15th century buildings.

The big question was where to fish; but once you got to the water level and could see where all the clinging algae was, there were deeper pockets, *much deeper* pockets that held fish. The return was not great, and the fishing was technical. I hooked and lost one nice marble trout, they were there, and then picked up two average rainbows, whilst Simon and Rob, both secured a fish each. This is one that I will have to revisit to fully explore what is available on the next visit.

We reconvene only to discover that the van had punctured the tyre. Simon jumps to it and quickly put his mechanical skills to work, changing it with time to spare. In the process he only creates an uncertainty as to surviving the next few days, with the discovery of a significant 'lip' that has been gouged into the brake discs, from the non-existent brake pads; at least we now were certain what is generating the incessant squeal as we negotiate corners, bends and stop lights as we flew around Slovenia!

It didn't stop us though and off we trek to the lower Soca. And what a day, it is about 38-39 degrees and blistering sun. The river was low, but only by its standards. The deep holes proved to be extremely deep. As I covered a large grayling and 'small' rainbow towards the end of the day, repeatedly they ignore the fly, easily seen drifting by at 2 meters down. Finally, I add some more weight, and extend my leader, and at about 3 meters depth, the 'small' rainbow decides to grab it. Up it comes, and continues to come up and grow in size; I have been thinking about 2lb swimming on the bottom, but when it hits the fly and is landed, it was easily the best fish of the trip at 7.5lbs (weighed). Mind you, the other two have been through enough by this stage and are swimming in the cool waters off to the side.

The river fishing was tough, but with enough rewards to make it beneficial. Rob located, hooked and lost a truly remarkable marble trout, easily 20+ pounds.

The biggest problem was escaping the other anglers in this region, that necessitated several moves through the day.

There was no restaurant meal this day, with lunch taken by the river, and the sky filled with competitive paragliders. They raced through a series of checkpoints from a starting point, amongst other competitions. The sky was completed, with the ability to count over 100 in the sky on the peaks at any one time.

As the return to our accommodation is so long, we pull in for some Italian food at a restaurant on the way home. Calzones all around, and they are massive, filled with cheese, ham and tomato and washed down with the local brews. There really is something special about not having to drive. We discuss where we have been, plot the locations on the map, and look at where we are going. Tomorrow the Radovna.

Day Four – Thursday, 15 September 2016 - Radovna

Again our day starts early, and we are not aware of the treat that awaits us. Rok has been promising to give us an experience of all the river varieties that Slovenia provides, and the Radovna is surreal and different in every respect.

Whilst for us, it starts in a local town, flowing clear over weirs and through pools, after lunch, it is almost wilderness, overcast by soft fog and haze, cold and full of fish. Again the size was not to be large, but here there was a chance of a brook trout, at least the sign identifying the species available suggested, as does the large cast in the local pub where we buy the licences, and the fish are plentiful.

I begin casting at the head of a pool with nymphs and dries as it flows over the weir. I miss the strike on one, but can't seem to interest the others. Microdrift? After having to stop to show my licence to the fishing inspector, I adjust sides, can't see the fish now, but can still picture where they were holding, and cast. The change of drift does wonders, I go from pauper to king, hooking small to medium rainbow trout on each cast. After 6 of these magnificently marked creatures, I decide to move upriver, with Rok's insistence, and then find some truly majestic water!

It is the right depth to wade, and has the classic riffle, run, glide, pool mix that is etched in the memory of many a fly fisher. The fish aren't easy, nor are many of the drifts or casts, due to cover, fallen timber, overgrowth, or rock ledges. But the challenge and persistence is rewarded. I start with mainly the nymph, but notice some rises in a long right turning pool, with a lovely sand bar on the left side, reminding me of a favourite pool on the Thredbo. I switch to a yellow humpy, and then have a fantastic time with 4 fantastically marked, medium sized brown trout. (This river flows away from the Marble trout catchment, and thus does not allow cross breeding.)

The day continues upwards through this fantastic location. We grab lunch at a 'farm house' in a large field by the river, and the soup and bread are top notch. And continue on to another section after lunch through the evening. I take some fantastic photos of Rob in the mist, casting to fish, and then we call it a day.

We finish the day at another stretch of the river, where there is an old mill, that is now a bed and breakfast. The water and town are lovely, and I head downriver to fish the water below the weir, thinking of the success I've had at the other weirs on this and other rivers. Getting into the water proves adventurous, with a slide down a bank, and through a heap of stinging nettle, doesn't help that I grabbed it to slow my descent, not a good start. Then I find the river is shallow, and by shallow I mean ankle deep. But here and there are a few fish. I'm casting rather aimlessly at spots, and miss a few takes, until I reach the pool at the bottom of the weir. It's long, and deep, at least 2 metres, and there is right angle in the water cascading over the top that gives about 60 meters of tumbling, aerated water... and there are fish. They are leaping out to get the food before others. They are not huge, but again, size isn't everything. So cast after cast, I'm picking up these aggressive browns and rainbows, mostly on dries, small ant patterns and beetles, what I would use in Australia for the same situation.

When the activity slows, I switch to a nymph and fish the channels between the rock ledges, and bang! This is something different, it takes a bit of coaxing to avoid it cutting me off on the rock edges, but then a nice two and a half pounder of a brown comes to the net. I let her swim away, and then decide that it's enough. It's starting to rain, and so I climb out, see that Rob has

reached the same decision and walk the 80 metres back to the car. We get out of our waders and watch as Simon casts to some nice rises, catches one and then with the rain cooling things down, we all call it done.

Another day, where we have lost count of what we caught, not that it matters, the location, company, vista and realisation that it is our last full day make it memorable.

Day Five and Home – Friday, 16 September 2016 – Sora and Sava Rivers

We awake on our last day to what is really a half-day fishing and then travelling. After a hearty breakfast, Rok, decides to take us to a beat on the Sora, and beat it is, from one location, if I travel too far upriver, I'm in a second licenced area, and then at the next it is downriver. The easy access makes this popular, but hidden, as it flows through industrial areas, farmland and towns. Easily dismissible if you have visited the other rivers in the area.

So Rok sets us up on our first area. A long sweeping curve of a river, with Simon and then Rob in front of me. The river is shallow and warm, and I'm ready to dismiss it, particularly given the heat of the summer and the last few days down here. But 'when in Rome' or this case Slovenia... So I cast, and start seeing a few rises. I'm downsizing flies, as they are not taking off the surface but to rising nymphs, so the trick is to get the cast forward, down and then lifting in very tight confines... and then strike. It's not big, not even close, about 12cm, and it's something other than a trout or grayling. Rok looks at the photo later and tells me it's a whitefish. Then I hook something else and this is also a new species, like the lakefish of Finland, resembling a small tarpon in some ways, but it goes unnamed.

Then I hook some small, 15-20cm grayling. No trout, but then it's still welcome, as I've seen somethings that were unexpected. We catch up to the others, the beats aren't long and we're off to the second spot.

Rok, puts me down in what appears to be an industrial centre on a bridge. It turns out it is a textiles factory, not large, but still rather obtrusive, and Rok suggests fishing the pool up to the water outlet that I can see to the right. I must admit, I'm not really enthused, so I walk downriver to see what might be

found. It's too shallow, I catch, but they are schools of whitefish, and I'm not really that enthused.

So I climb the little weir, and immediately a trout scampers! The only problem is the huge school of whitefish that occupy the bottom of the pool, easily 200 fish! Funny that they are called whitefish, as the school is nothing but dark grey to black and blot out everything beneath them. Either they spook forward and startle the other fish, or a daring one erupts on the fly, as I'm fishing dries to try to avoid them.

They suddenly all move en masse to the other side of the pool, I glance up and see a trickle of 'milky' water coming down from the outflow ahead. Then it is a gush, and I'm standing in it. Thank god I'm in waders. The fish don't like it, so I use this to push forward to the clearer water at the next weir, the outlet from what appears to be a power station, but isn't, and the lovely sandbar that divides the two, creating a great back eddy on the right. The fish are lined up!

These aren't rising, so I switch to the nymph, because they are obviously feeding, and then I start catching. They're rainbows, male and female, not as well coloured as on the Radovna, but well conditioned and 'fat.' As they are released, they skip downstream, across to the sandbar and take up residence at its tail; almost as if inviting me to catch the next in line, so I do. Then there is a rise, hard against the wall and grate in the back eddy, and this is a good fish, about 4-5 pounds, and a brown. The cast will need some slack, lots of slack to avoid it being ripped out, and to avoid being seen in the pool. I tie on a large Royal Wulff to match the size of the moths flying around and let it go... not taken as it floats around, then as it starts to drag and comes to the close side, a flashing strike and another nice rainbow comes to hand.

Two more casts produce identical results, as I'm about to lift to recast, another fish comes. Then it goes quiet. I try firing it against the wall, nothing, against the grate, nothing, huge reach and aerial mends, nothing, slack line casts, nothing. At least my casting is getting a work out!

Finally, I change to a klinkhammer, throw that out, and this time I'm in! The brown casually sips the fly, not the thrashing strike of its rainbow cousins, and I see its head, it's a good size, but a poor hook-up. This time it runs me around

the grate, the line parts and a second later the fly bobs back to the surface too. Next time... so we go to the final spot.

For me the last location proves poor, there is a large chub swimming the length of the pool, but I lack the knowledge of what to catch it on with a fly rod. I don't see any trout or grayling, but there are hundreds, thousands (?), of whitefish. So I work the beat and have some fun, seeing how large and how crazy the fly will be to catch them. Remarkably they are quite finicky, and before long I'm cycling through flies and sizes to try to imitate what they are feeding on, because they certainly are feeding. I catch a few, and some are bigger than a pound, but there is no way that I feel anything less than 'lucky' as I miss many more than I hook.

I return to the car, and Simon reports some good to fair fishing, and then we wait for Rob. We're still waiting, and out of our gear and wondering if we will make the flight when Rob shows up, a grin on his face and a photo of the prize grayling of the trip, easily 3+ pounds and 45+ centimetres, measured against the butt of his rod. A great way to finish off the trip, and a reminder to me that within one hundred metres a river's outlook can change significantly.

So it's back to the hotel, the hosts have really extended themselves and let us keep the rooms for a last minute shower, it's needed, repack and change of clothes. We say our goodbyes, see you again and thanks. Rok drives us to the airport and we hastily jump out, make some quick plans, and discuss fishing for Taimen, season is during winter and head to the check in. We get through without too much trouble, a couple of rude Americans, never seem to avoid them, and then upstairs to wait for the plane, and have some lunch.

The plane is delayed three hours due to weather in London preventing departure, so we settle down to our game of cards, play a dozen hands and really don't mind. The duration was about right, and we'll be back.

Summary

So how was it? Maybe this explains the degree of enjoyment in the immersion in another culture. I wasn't even on the plane back to the UK, and I was actively trying to convince my wife and family to 'ditch' Scotland and return in October. Fantastic doesn't even begin to cover it, and by all accounts the fishing for us was 'tough' given the time of year and water levels. And there are many more waters to explore and stretches that have to be fished, I won't get to it all, but I'll certainly be back.

We started Monday with Luka, and fished the rest of the week with Rok, both finding us fish and each of us gaining experience and knowledge throughout the days. A week under their watchful eyes, equated to months of do-it-yourself improvement. *"Up, up, up, up..."*

By no means was this easy, the terrain was varied and interesting, from steep fast streams, to slower braids. The water was cold to cool, and the vista remote to industrial. The trout and grayling didn't seem to mind, so neither did we. But we walked, and for those not practiced, it led to cramps and soreness, particularly in the 30+ degree temperatures.

The result, satisfaction and accomplishment; each day saw a different river, or section of river; the upper Soca, fast and cold; the lower Soca, wide with deep pools and cold; the Radnova, cool and shallow; the Sava Dolinka, pocket water, extremely fast flow and kayakers; the Sava, industrial and slow; the Idrijca... but all were memorable and painted a picture of the Western end of this small nation.

But it wasn't all fishing, touring the region where the Italians, Russians and Austro-Hungarians fought during World War 1, brought increased empathy with the trials faced by my Italian Grandfather. There are few monuments but each was touched with a sense of nostalgia and understanding for their efforts.

After five days, what was the verdict? We agreed it was probably about right, we could have kept going, but were tired and sated. Goals had been met, new species and varying sizes of fish were landed; marble trout, Adriatic grayling, rainbow trout, whitefish; but we left with a desire to return for the elusive 10+lb marble trout, and the Arctic Char. Not even the 3 hour delay of the return flight could dampen our spirits. So there are many thanks to Rob for his efforts.

As to guides, Rok Lustrik, www.lustrik.com