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Oh Vienna!



Carefully does it.

ANDREW HOGG says that, apart from the history, architecture, opera and culture, Austria's capital also offers polished sport in one of its rare chalkstreams



Since I was eight years old, fishing has been my life. It has brought me many things that I treasure dearly, and served as a major point in my growing up in rural Scotland. Fishing was fun with your mates. It was escaping to places where nobody ever went. It was about learning confidence in your own abilities and applying them. It was the challenge of pitting your wits against some unseen leviathan that you just knew was hiding behind the rock at the head of the pool. No matter what was happening in my life I was always able to forget it all for a day, or an evening, and get lost at the waterside. So, how do I cope with living in Vienna then? Surely all of these old memories will remain nothing more than glimpses of a once-cherished reality?

For those of you who don't know, there is a rather special place only 40 minutes' drive from Vienna city centre where anglers regularly loose themselves amongst hard-fighting trout and grayling in total peace and tranquillity.

This special place is called the Fischa Dagnitz and I was invited by ÖFG (Österreichische Fischereigesellschaft) president Franz Kiwek and bailiff Alfred Hani to come and see this treasure for myself. Both of them have grown up fishing the river and know it like the backs of their hands.

It is a small narrow river by nature that winds and meanders through the lush countryside of Lower Austria and originates from two underground springs near the village of Haschendorf before it sets off on a 60-kilometre journey towards the mighty River Danube. What does it offer a fly angler then? Firstly, and most importantly, it is a natural chalkstream; one of the few in this region of Austria. Secondly, it has a Mayfly hatch that is unrivalled by any river in the whole of Lower Austria. The other main attraction of the Dagnitz is that fact that it can be fished on a day permit for relatively little money. ➤➤

Fin perfect, the Dagnitz supports a population of wild rainbows.

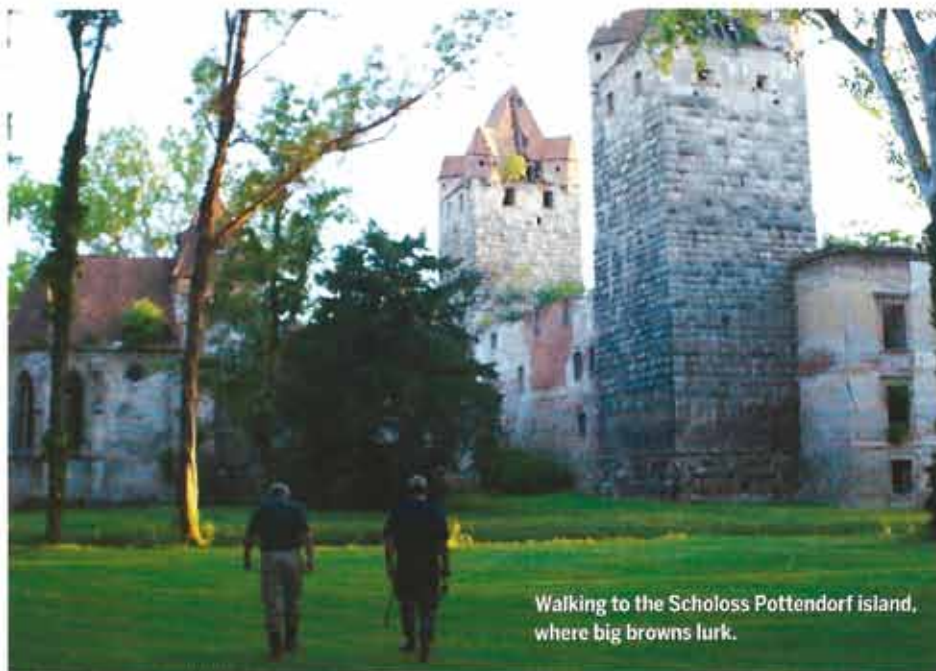
◀ Sounds good, doesn't it?

It was early June, and being back at a small river in the evenings' glow really made me feel like a boy again, taking me straight back to my childhood when such environments were a part of so many long sunny evenings spent with a fly rod and few good friends: the city also seemed like it was already a million miles away. Franz was quick to tell me that the Fischa Dagnitz was what is classed as a "classic" stretch and the rules dictate that only dry flies, wet flies and nymphs up to 20mm in size may be used in conjunction with a floating line. As the rods were being assembled I was busy watching the Mayflies that were already dancing over our heads and attempting to land on our caps. It certainly lifted our spirits, as Austria had only recently experienced the heaviest rains and flooding for over one hundred years. Whole villages had been practically washed out and even some parts of Vienna were affected with the Danube reaching record levels. The Dagnitz had been up and down over the whole of May and the water still had a bit of colour to it. We were here to do business though, and off we walked alongside the fields and down to the river. Fishing could now commence in earnest.

INTEREST

We worked our way down the river with Franz fishing a dry Mayfly imitation and Alfred choosing to stick with an old, faithful nymph. It seemed like an intelligent decision, as they would hopefully be able to establish which method would tickle the trout's fancy without too much time being lost. Casting the small nymph across the river soon brought interest from a Fischa Dagnitz resident and the first fish of the evening, a small brown trout of around six inches, was quickly landed. After a quick pose for the camera he indignantly splashed his way back into the river.

Alfred began recasting his nymph, leaving Franz to fish a little further ahead of us with his still extremely dry Mayfly attached to his leader. Just as Franz was out of sight a large



Walking to the Scholoss Pottendorf island, where big browns lurk.



The river hosts some large brown trout.

Hatching Dun (Alfred Baudisch)

This is an original pattern from the Alfred Baudisch, a river keeper on the Dagnitz, that has proven to be deadly when the Mayfly hatch is in earnest. It imitates the stage where the Mayfly hatches from its nymphal shuck in perfect detail and can be fished dry or just sub-surface thanks to the Polycelcon wing-cover. It is a simple and effective pattern to tie.

Hook: Fine-wired grubber, size 8-12.

Silk: Brown.

Tail: 4-5 cream marabou fibres (this represents the discarded nymph shuck).

Abdomen: 50% yellow hare's ear and 50% natural seal's fur, mixed.

Hackle: Cree, ideally with dark centre, wound 2-3 times. **Thorax:** As abdomen.

Wing/thorax cover: Yellow or white Polycelcon flexible foam, with mallard (or partridge) fibres drawn over the top of it. Allow the tips of the fibres to stand up behind the head after tying down to create the effect of the wings starting to emerge.



Alfred's Hatching Mayfly Dun.

boil just under the surface was met by a cry from Alfred. This was a much better fish. Desperately trying to keep it away from the mass of tangled and exposed tree-roots on the far bank, Alfred applied enough pressure to bring the fish into the main body of the river. Careful playing over the next few minutes soon saw a fine rainbow trout of around the two-pound mark lying beaten at the side of his waders.

Seeing a rainbow trout in a river is beyond weird for me. As a native Scot I did not see many rainbow trout, and certainly never from a river. Those that I did see were often flabby, finless and stumpy nosed creatures from holes in the ground that held little fascination for me. What I was observing here, though, was a completely different creature altogether. Full fins with countless small black spots. A long, muscular body of perfect proportion and a gill cover that looked like it had been polished at a car factory. There could be no visual comparison between what I had seen as a child and what I was seeing now. The rainbow trout that was held before my camera lens was one of the highest standards and certainly not what I had imagined prior to arriving. It came as no surprise to learn from Franz that the rainbows have established a natural spawning population in the Dagnitz following their introduction after the second World War.

PERFECTION

No sooner had Alfred released his fine rainbow we could hear the cries from further round the bank from Franz who had finally managed to get his dry fly sunk thanks to the help of a Dagnitz trout. "It's a good one! Better than that minnow you just photographed for Alfred!" he laughed as I joined him. "Just make sure it comes in," I added, as the trout was heading straight for some low, overhanging branches on the bend. "How big do you reckon it is?" I asked Franz. The look of total concentration said all that I needed to know. A better fish was indeed attached, and again a long, hard battle took place with the trout trying almost everything imaginable to try and evade capture. Just as the fish was beginning to tire, the battle took a new direction as the trout found a hidden reserve of power, surged away and somehow managed to jump through a hole between the nearside bank and a washed-down



First fish of the evening.

piece of tree branch. Honestly, you couldn't make this up. With both angler and fish totally confused I put down the camera and ran down to the water's edge, frantically trying to snap the branch – which I did, but only to leave a two foot length of branch tangled to the leader. I assume, or rather I hope, Franz found the whole episode amusing. With the fish and branch being carefully played out against the current the fight was soon over and a very happy Franz picked out a stunning rainbow of over two pounds from the river. Again, the trout was a picture of perfection.

Franz and Albert had decided to show me another fascinating piece of the river system further upstream from where we had been. Dating back to the 14th Century, the ruined "Schloss Pottendorf" (a mansion) sits on an island with the river being diverted around it in a moat. As we arrived I must admit that looking at the apparently lifeless stretch of flat water with a few ducks milling around on it didn't really light my fire. Albert quietly flicked out his nymph into the middle of the moat and began

a slow figure-of-eight retrieve. I wasn't really paying much attention, but Franz's concentration suddenly heightened and his quiet whispers directed at Albert began to grow in intensity to an excitable rabble. At this point, a truly monstrous set of lips came into view behind the fly. The lips belonged to a massive brown trout that had, unseen to me, decided to investigate the nymph on its bank-ward voyage. With all three of us completely transfixed on what could be about to unfold, our mouths hanging open and every brain cell combined urging the fish to take, we watched the trout follow right up to the margins and simply fade away back into the depths. I reckon our heartbeats could have been heard in outer space, and gave us all that "what if?" feeling that we relived again and again later in the pub.

So the next time you think of Vienna you can think of more than just the city itself. You can imagine more than the beautiful architecture of the city centre, more than the amazing food, more than the historical sites that pop up throughout its entirety, more than the opera, and more than the cultural specialities that make Vienna truly unique. You can also think of a special place where grown men still have the possibility to feel like young boys chasing unknown dark shadows in perfect peace.

Andrew Hogg has been fishing since he was a boy and loves the hill lochs of the Western Highlands in his native Scotland. He is also the owner of guiding company Wildside Fishing.

Information

Tickets can be bought from The ÖFG, Elisabethstrasse 22, 1010, Vienna. The Dagnitz is broken into 3 stretches and they all cost €90 (about £75) per day. A Gastekarte (Guest card) must be bought in addition. This card lets you fish for one month in the region and costs €11. There is a 3-fish per day limit, and most anglers practice catch-and-release. The season starts on March 16 and closes on September 15 for brown trout, December 31 for rainbow trout and grayling. The best time for the Mayfly hatch is mid May - mid June. The ÖFG can also be found online at <http://www.oefg1880.at>



Franz works upstream.



Alfred plays a nice wild rainbow.