

Czech Mates

Ben Bangham and friends take a trip to the Czech Republic to sample the fantastic river fishing, under the guidance of some of the world's best river anglers and guides...



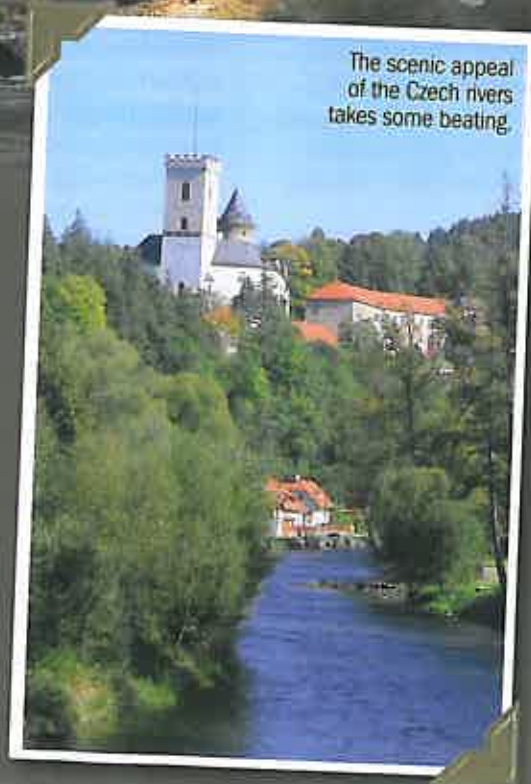
For me, and I am sure some of you, fishing isn't just a pastime, it's a way of life. There are few places in the world where fishing is ingrained into the way of life for so many people as it is in the Czech Republic. Whether you are a complete fanatic like me, or just a part-time enthusiast, you can't help but be swept away with the whole experience of fishing in such a diverse and beautiful place.

The Czechs look after what they have there, with strict rules and regulations governing fishing. The licences are relatively expensive, especially compared to ours, but then you can see where the money is being spent. They

look after their waterways; they even have stocking programmes to replace the fish that have been taken by predation and suchlike. For instance, the River Vltava was stocked last year with small grayling and browns to ensure its future. The grayling population was pretty much wiped out by cormorants over the past decade. However, now the cormorants are under control, they can work on nursing this beautiful fish and its population back to a healthy level.

Some of you may be saying that you don't want to be catching stocked fish. Fair enough. However, these fish are put in as fingerlings, so by the time they reach a reasonable size they are pretty much wild. Take my word

The scenic appeal of the Czech rivers takes some beating.



for it, when you catch these fish you will not be able to tell the difference and you will also be thanking the Czechs for having the foresight to initiate such a project.

I have to say, we really could take a leaf from their book about ensuring that there is a future in fishing. It is just a shame that with how our fishing is set up this isn't really possible. It would be nice to see more clubs and fisheries using a bit more initiative and encouraging a wild fishing experience.

don't really have the fishing infrastructure or reasonably priced way of life to really make it a commercially viable thing to do on our shores.

The main limiting factors are the cost of fishing, the relatively small sizes of our fisheries and the very high price of food and lodging.

In the Czech Republic, however, these are not issues because their fisheries are huge and food and lodging is very reasonable.

The courses that Milan runs are truly enjoyable,

The June course is the more hardcore of the two, with fishing available 17 hours a day

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One of the best aspects of the competition fly fishing scene for me is the people that you meet on your travels. I have met many people and formed some very good and strong friendships over the last few years. In fact, I would probably not be writing this if I hadn't fished against a certain Steve Cullen all those years ago.

Even the current editor, Andy Taylor, and I originally met treading the banks of the infamous River Dee, cap hunting.

One of the places that I have developed a special affinity for, both the people and the country, is the Czech Republic. Through the friendships that I have formed I have been able to team up with Milan Hladik, who runs a course twice a year, fishing the River Vltava in the South Bohemia region of the Czech Republic.

When initially talking to Milan about the courses I thought it was a truly great idea. It is one that I have looked at with regard to starting one over here but, sadly, in my opinion we

offering a great atmosphere as well as a fantastic chance to learn from some of the best fishermen in the world.

At his disposal are numerous World and European champions, as well as other top angling guides. Put this together with the beautiful scenery and world-class rivers and you have something pretty special indeed.

With the cost of living being much lower than over here, the accommodation and food is of a very good standard at a fraction of the price than what we are used to. The food is pretty much made up of meat and potatoes (not a very vegetarian-friendly country) and the accommodation is simple, but always clean, comfortable and welcoming.

The September Course

This is counted as the social course. At this time of year the



The sedge hatch is spectacular, so expect plenty of surface sport.



With the pension on the banks of the river you can sneak out at first light to wet a line.



The group in all its glory - attendees and guides of the June 2015 workshop.

temperature and the weather can be pretty variable, so we tend to pack for all seasons when attending this one. Being right on the cusp of autumn, and with their seasons being much more distinct, the difference in temperature from day to day can be huge.

The main focus is on nymphing, so all techniques are looked at through the week. The two main areas that are fished in this week are the River Vltava in and around the area that you stay, with the odd day excursion up into the mountains and the upper Vltava; this is very different indeed. The river in the mountains is much smaller and more akin to the chalkstreams of the south. There is a larger head of grayling and they are bigger; some of the big specimens are very dark and just stunning. They have managed to survive the cormorants' attentions because the river freezes

over in winter when the cormorants are prevalent. This also means that the grayling don't grow as quickly, though, due to the lower average water temperatures. As a result, a fish of 35 centimetres is a specimen, but I have to say that what they lack in size they more than make up for in beauty.

Although the main focus is on nymphing, there are always a few times when a perfectly placed dry fly can score very well. As well as this, techniques such as fishing streamers can work. This isn't something that we really do in the UK but is a big part of fishing on the Continent and can be pretty exciting.

After the change of season, autumn can be a beautiful time of year. With the changing colour of the leaves, the mist rolling off the river into the trees and the bellows of the rutting stags in the forest, there is almost a sense of going back in time.

The evening social – a chance to pick the brains of the guides and swap fishing stories.



This stunning 'brookie' couldn't resist Ben's dry sedge.



A range of dry-fly fishing techniques are covered, including double-dry and Spanish casting.





“This year, one evening in particular was beyond special with clouds of sedges flying around and the trout hurling themselves at them.”

The social side of the experience kicks in as the evenings draw in at around 5pm to 6pm. This means that everyone is off the river and in the *pension* accommodation tying flies and drinking beer. It's a great opportunity to talk to the guides and pick their brains, as well as getting to know some of the others on the course, who come from all over the world. It's also a great time to swap fishing stories with fellow enthusiasts.

The June Course

This could be looked on as the more hardcore trip of the two, with fishing available for probably 17 hours a day.

Because the *pension* is on the banks of the river, you can soak out at first light to have a cast before breakfast if you desire. The rivers that we fish are more varied than in September for the simple reason that more of them are open at this time of the year. Some of the sections of river

totally shut in September for the trout breeding season. All of them are within an hour of base and have very different personalities. From the small, overgrown characteristics of the Masse to the high-octane wading of the Devil's Stones, you are faced by different challenges each day.

Due to the time of year, the emphasis is on the dry fly and the techniques and tactics that you can employ while dry-fly fishing, including downstream dry, double dry, Spanish casting and so on. Supper is early in summer to give you a chance to go out and hit a sedge hatch as the day draws

to a close. This is something that you have to experience at least once; the hatch is spectacular to say the least.

This year, one evening in particular was beyond special with clouds of sedges flying around and the trout hurling themselves at them. I can honestly say that I have never had any dry-fly fishing that even comes close to competing with this. This is the busier of the two courses, with many more people from different countries, and as such the social side is pretty good!

The idea of these trips is to get carried away by the fishing. So all your licences,

tickets, accommodation and transport are sorted for you, leaving you one very important job indeed... to enjoy your fishing.

Whether you are there to learn from some of the best anglers in the world, to master a specific technique that you have been playing with for a while, or just to get away from it all and go fishing, then these courses offer you the freedom to do whatever it is you want to do in a unique location. ❧

For further information on the September course email Ben @ flyfishingben@gmail.com

Pheasant Tail Variant

Hook: Hanak b450 jig hook, sizes 12 to 16

Head: Metallic pink bead to match **Thread:** Black

Tail: Coq de leon

Rib: Fine copper wire **Body:** Pheasant tail

Thorax: Hends Spectra dubbing 45



Yellow-Arsed Caddis

Hook: Hanak b130 dry fly hook, sizes 12 to 16

Thread: Black **Butt:** bright yellow dubbing **Body:**

Hare's ear dubbing **Underwing:** CDC **Overwing:**

stacked deer hair **Hackle:** Brown cock hackle

