



The waters flow very clear unless there has been heavy rainfall and there are more miles of river and tributary than could be fished in a single lifetime. In many places along the river a fly fisher can wade bank to bank during low water conditions, and anywhere across the typical 100 metre width you might find grayling and trout. So too might you catch chub and pretty, lightning-fast dace, or even huge barbel and the mysterious nase; all these species come to the fly.



Taimen, locally called huchen or Danube salmon, lurk here; deadly, huge predators that occasionally take a fly, but commonly take a trout or a grayling that is actually on your fly! Once, while catching both trout and grayling on a double nymph rig (a maximum of two flies on a leader is allowed in Poland) on the San close to the railway junction town of Zagorz, I hooked a large, lively brown trout upstream of a deep scoop, like a lagoon of cerulean blue water. The trout dropped down towards the scoop and then turned to

hover on the lip, as if unwilling to venture into the deeper water. I held it there and began to work the fish upstream towards the net. From out of the deep a shadow swept up, a Jaws-like beast materialising from the abyss. In a detonation of spray, a taimen hit my trout and I was left holding a limp line in the flow; the trout and the predator were gone. I was simply stunned by this and got out of the water.

Fishing the San is a life-changing experience. Captivated by the beauty of this extreme south-eastern

corner of Europe, on the border country of Poland, Ukraine and Slovakia, the trout and grayling fisherman feels as if he has arrived at journey's end. The San is a sort of deliverance for us; you cannot go beyond, not in this life.

I have stood in the flow watching unimaginable numbers of several ephemeral species simultaneously hatching, with grayling seething at the surface, and marauding trout slashing at the duns, all on a scale absolutely impossible in the UK. Imagine Grafham North-shore in



June, during a massive hatch of buzzers, with the trout really up for it, and add to this a good summer evening dun hatch on the Wharfe with browns and grayling intermingling for the harvest. These, in combination, might get somewhere close to what is possible, and frequent, on the San River.

Do not run away with the idea that fishing the San is always easy, however. I remember fishing with my England team-mate Baz Reece, as we prepared for the 2004 European Championships. Together we witnessed one of these incredible, massed rises to olive uprights.

At any point during the rise, which lasted about two hours, we could each have touched perhaps ten grayling with our rod tips, yet we could get hardly a fish to take our flies. During the rise Baz managed three grayling while I caught two trout.

Only as the rise began to fade did our own flies become significant among the hatch and we began to catch more consistently. At other times, also, while fish have been seen to be actively feeding, on or below the surface, several of us have struggled to catch.



Frequently I have had to down-size my flies, bearing in mind the ultra-clear water, even fishing dries down to size 24, on 7X tippet. In the autumn and winter months on San, when the water is typically low and clear, we fish tiny, sparse nymphs, upstream with no indicator. Last October I watched Paul Procter doing this with breathtaking efficiency. I had thought my own nymphs for these situations were sparse until I saw Paul's almost bare-hook patterns.

It is a matter of scale, and timing. In spring and summer, among the super-abundance of invertebrate life that swells the San, the wandering fly fisher can have outstanding sport with a pair of size 12 or 14 nymphs, perhaps even a 10 on point if the water is up. You can slowly wade the river's enormity, losing yourself among the grayling shoals or hunting the shallows and the features for utterly wild brown trout.

Later in the year, after the typical rains of late June and July have dwindled, we tend to scale down in fly size and tippet diameter. This is the period when dry fly becomes the superior method, which persists even into the winter months, certainly into December.

One February during heavy snow, fishing with Wojtek Gibinski, my very good friend and a superb guide, we came to a large area of flat water close to the bank, and grayling began rising to tiny black midge.

On went a size 22 black Muller (an emerger pattern) and back came the prize of grayling on the dry; in snowfall.



