

Karel Křivanec

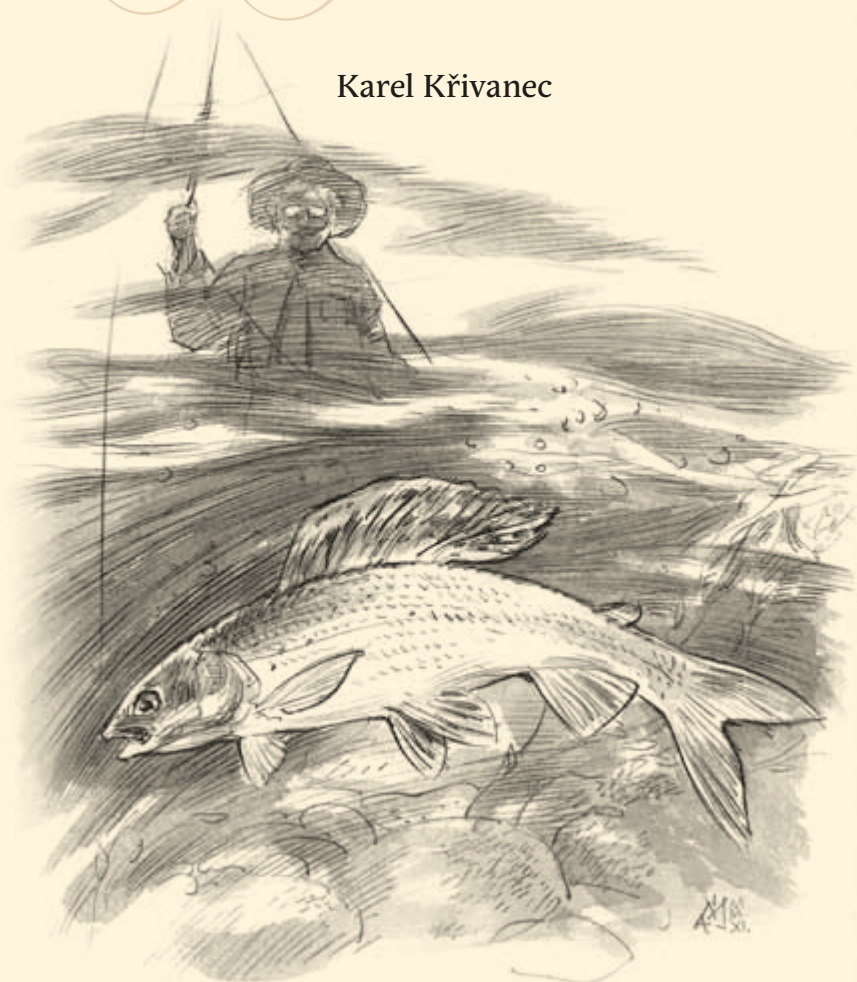
*Fishing in*  
**GRAYLING  
PARADISE**



# *Grayling Paradise*

## FISHING IN GRAYLING PARADISE

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## *Short story of a little pool* **Short story of a little pool (2003)**

In October last year I was walking along the Warm Vltava below Dobrá. I came across an inconspicuous but deep little pool below a thin run. It was about five p.m., the time when grayling usually ignored our dry flies. They'd stopped coming to the surface almost an hour ago and so I changed to a bottom fly. That was not much better, however.

I used two weighted Czech nymphs, similar to the original types of sedge larva of the *Hydropsyche* genus which was effective here throughout the year. I guided them just below the rod tip and moved them slowly through the deeper parts of the pool. I worked the nymphs systematically through this hole and moved slowly along. At the point where the river



turned slowly to the left, a large grayling suddenly threw itself above the water. It was just a short and sudden moment and I estimated the fish to have been some 45 cm long.

I would normally not expect such a large grayling in that a small pool. However, the water was waist deep and I realized that the pool was in fact only the upper part of a long, wide and stable pool. Since its location and profile had not changed significantly for years, I figured that my grayling was probably part of the small group of large fish observed there regularly and sometimes caught.

Two weeks later I returned to this location. I waited in the cottage for a favorable time and set out at half past twelve. The first grayling start to rise after one p.m. By half past one you might catch on the small olive or quill a huge fish. I was a little bit late this day and had also spent some time in the main pool only reaching my spot shortly before three p.m. It was still warm in the sunshine, but getting cold in the shadows. The blue sky of the Sumava Mountains was partially covered by white clouds, which covered the sun periodically and therefore this weather was ideal for swarming of little upwings and black midges.

It was really quiet at my pool, but I knew better. I was prowling through the bent-grass hills on the left bank waiting for my fish. Not long after I suddenly saw a medium-size grayling rise ring just in the narrowest part where the current runs into the pool. It was not the largest ring which would indicate that it was a really big fish, but I suspected that it might be Him.

I moved closer to the ideal casting distance and presented my size 18 CDC Parachute Olive on the spot where I suspected him to be lying. The fly drifted sedately across the pool; the grayling rose again showing me his location. The right presentation of the appropriate fly on the finest possible tippet are basic requirements for successful autumn dry fly fishing on the Warm Vltava. I made two false casts to dry the fly and gently placed it about





one and half meters from the last rise. The cast was a really good one; the petite fly fluttered directly to the grayling and drifted extremely realistically towards the grayling somewhere on the bottom.

A rise to intercept the olive indicated that this time the master of the pool had been fooled. I waited a second and then gently struck with my wrist. My five weight Sage bent at the tip and nothing happened. The bend in the rod was the only indication that the fish was hooked. For a moment we stood face to face. Grayling shook his head attempting to rid himself of the little thing in the right hand corner of his mouth. Failing in this, he turned and started to swim slowly following the current into the pool.

I wanted to document this special moment and tried to extract my camera from my vest with my left hand. It was not easy since a couple of fly boxes, forceps, spectacles, scissors and many other fly-fishing little bits of equipment hampered my search with left hand un used to such intricacy. I also needed to maintain contact with with my right hand, because with such a small hook and fragile tippet, the fish might easily escape.

I wanted to take pictures of the whole fight with the Sumava mountains as background. I moved downstream to work my fish away from the

deep pool to the shallower runs below. Thirty metres down I found the right location and I stopped and applied pressure. Mr Grayling could not believe it and, body and all, jumped above the surface. Large Warm Vltava grayling do this in shallow water pretty often showing off their beautiful dark purple coats.

Controlling the rod with my right hand, I pressed the shutter release of my Olympus loaded with high-sensitivity Kodak. I took my time observing the fight through the viewfinder. He tried various tricks to escape: He rolled at the bottom for a while. He made figures-of-eights at the surface for some time, but the tiny Japanese-made hook the strong 0.10 mm diametre tippet held.

I lifted the grayling to the water surface and pushed the release button a couple of times. The oblique sun's rays lit the water beautifully and I pushed the release a couple more times for a good measure before the fish lay quietly on its left side and I could hold him underneath and measure him. I measured him accurately with my wooden measure retrieved from my basket. He was the most beautifully proportioned cockfish, probably five years old, and he measured 42.2 cm from the top of his nose to the tip



of his tail. I observed him carefully for a while wondering whether this was the same fish which had escaped two weeks ago. Later I had to admit that I really must have had big eyes.

I released him carefully from the tiny hook and placed him back into his natural environment. He could not believe it and remained motionless in the shallow water for a minute or so, allowing me to take more pictures. Then he slowly swam into the current and was lost from my view. I knew this was probably the last time I would meet him and felt really blessed with this opportunity.

I was unable to return to this locality that year. But I could, at least, view my pictures of the fight recollecting the unforgettable sequence covering just a couple of minutes and hoping that I had found a new locality





where it would still be possible to catch a large fish. I had the grayling's picture blown up and framed. Friends at home and even from abroad were interested in the picture. I presented one to the famous English author and fisherman Charles Jardin. He returned the gesture with the drawing of a trout which adorns my studio today.

The following season I was able to visit this place just once. It was after the prime grayling rise, which, on that day, was only sporadic anyway. My nymph was ineffective. My little pool was there like last year, but this time it seemed to be empty and not interesting at all. Not as it had been a couple of years ago.

Another autumn arrived and I took two days off to see the Warm Vltava again. Normally this time should be cold and rainy, but it was still warm. No heavy morning frost, the leaves were still on the trees although their color was changing to yellow and red. The weather was ideal and I waited for the right time for grayling to be rising, so that I could again try my favorite dry flies - I did not wish to fish in any other way.

Soon after lunch I drove to Dobrá. Passing some weekend cottages I discovered that its "diligent" inhabitants had built themselves a couple of speed-calming bumps, probably to protect their white house paint from splashes on rainy days and to protect their children and pets. One man who looked like a Prague city man attracted my attention. He was pulling a large dog on a leash and clearly disliked me driving there. Perhaps he thought I was going too fast. There was a 20 km per hour sign before the village, although it did not look really official to me. Try to drive at only 20 km per hour, for about 2 km - it's really frustrating.

I stopped the car behind the village to change into my chest waders. There were nowhere to be found. I'd left them in my cottage at Volary. So, I had to return to the Stogerova Hut. Passing the cottager again drove this brave man crazy. He ranted, but I could not hear him from the car and I'm not good at lip-reading (lucky me). I paid no attention to him and tried to calm down, although I felt like kicking his ... You know what I mean.

In a good mood I quickly changed. Maybe some young person would not see this action as "quick" but everything is relative to the age. Behind the car I relieved myself of excess fluid and put the neoprene pants straps over my shoulder. The signs were right for activity. I looked into the sky, took a warm cap to be sure I would be warm and walked to the river.



I marched through difficult terrain for about half an hour and finally at half past one I reached the Vltava river. My back was sweaty and the cap was wet. At that moment I saw the first little rise. I tested a few flies to find out what the grayling would like that day. After another lost hour I arrived at my little pool just before three o'clock. Just like before. But - what a surprise: My little pool had disappeared!

The normally narrow, ten metre wide river was now twice as wide. My little pool was completely filled up with stones and sand probably deposited by some winter or spring flood. Wild water had torn away the grassy left bank and exposed the rocky ground turning my little pool into a shallow river bed where an old alder trunk that had been washed downstream was stuck.

I was really surprised as I would never have expected such a dramatic change. I caught two little trout in a shallow stream behind the trunk and above it, five two year-old grayling on an olive nymph. I just stood there. Sad and aware that the Vltava river seemed to have quietly murmured a requiem for the demise of one small but promising pool.





## *Familiarization, one year later* **Familiarization one year later (2004)**

I will remember October 2004 for long time. The month which extended the summer and invited me and my fly-fishing rod to the Dobrá area beneath the Stozec Mountain of South Bohemia on ten occasions. To call the Stozec a mountain is perhaps too much. It is really just such a higher hill about one thousand metres above sea level. Anyway - when I observe it from my old cottage in Stögerova Hut it provides a lovely and pleasant view. Early in the morning a hanging mist made the Stozec look like it was wearing a white scarf. It burned off quite quickly and revealed a golden, sunny autumn day. Dark green spruces on top of the hill contrasted with the sky-blue sky above

it was impossible. Vladimir already had them in his belly and just nodded his head in quiet satisfaction.

Our half hour of calm was finished and it was necessary to start working. Volunteers began to cut wood, somebody started splitting logs and I took care of the cooking. This was only bread dumplings, since chicken soup from a whole chicken and goulash from a 3.5 kg beef shin had been ready since the day before. I estimated six packs of dumplings would be needed for the dinner, and at the end there wasn't a slice left. The court brewer tapped a bigger keg of beer and we also drank coke and rum, fernet, gin and whisky.

Martin amused us with a new story. He had caught a grayling near Lenora when suddenly a thirty-something year-old angler rushed over to him, wading five metres below him, completely trampling through the water and asked if he was fishing a wet fly even though Martin was obviously using a dry fly. Then he started to say that he had been there for three days and couldn't get anything but 40 cm fish. He said he was from Rozmberk but he didn't fish there as there was no fish - that "Mr Skrivanec" put sh.. there. Martin let him talk for a while, and then told him he was at that Mr Krivanec's weekend house, which managed to get rid of this champion. Stop at the height of things - that's my rule for such moments, and I stick to it, so I went to bed a bit after midnight, while some hung out till three in the morning.

Saturday morning was drizzly and the sky was covered with thick clouds. It stopped raining at about nine and that was the signal for all my guests to leave the house. The gentlemen headed for the water and I paid good attention





to where to go and where not. I went to Volary and in the square I found a big exhibition case full of different trophy cups. Believe it or not, they belonged to the local casting team and there were also trophies from the European junior championship! Who would have thought a couple of years ago that here, in the Sumava, it would be possible to bring up such good young anglers and achieve such results with them. Maybe one day the senior world championships will be held here.

I bought some supplies - a newspaper and a replacement axe handle which hadn't survived the previous day's work, and went back to start dinner preparations because we had a goose and two ducks with cabbage and dumplings on the menu. I nailed slats in the fence and this still progressed very slowly, but finally only the last part remained, which I put off for Sunday morning. I didn't much feel like going down to the water as I thought it wouldn't



be easy on the surface and I didn't really want to nymph. I may be getting to the age of the now-deceased Franta Drdák, who would sit on the bank of the Malse river below Římov and wait for the hatch, while we were in the water nymphing fish by fish.

At first I wanted to go into the woods above the Soumarský bridge, but in this weather only the meadows seemed acceptable. It was clear at "U stodoly", so I stopped here again and headed for the same spot as yesterday, and decided to go ahead down to the water. Circles on the surface were caused by small fish and they didn't pay much attention to my fly either. After half past two it started to rain a bit again and also an unpleasant wind came up. Below a little ripple, the water fell into a pool with an alder-tree over the water near the left bank. A beige dun disappeared into a quick snout, and one of 35 cm finally brought some excitement to this peacefulness.

This day I had my size 2 rod, which Jaja had brought for me yesterday, and so I got the idea to try a size 0.06 mm nylon tippet. There was nothing else to do, so I had to try it. To tie sizes six and eight in rain with blood knot was almost impossible - it took me maybe five minutes and I needed twice as much time to run the end of the line through the eye of the fly to make the most common knot. Everything stuck to my fingers and acted like it was alive, so I only managed to finish it using all my willpower. However, a size sixteen CDC dun was too big for this tippet size, and while casting the line it became so completely twisted that everything was now pointless and I didn't feel like trying another attempt. I left the fine tippet for another day.

I went down along the current and in the next pool I had three takes from larger fish, but I didn't manage to strike any of them, so I decided to make the fly a bit smaller. Meanwhile Vladimir passed by from a spot lower down the current, and boasted about a big grayling and an almost one kilo-heavy rainbow trout which he had caught on a nymph. Obviously, he had let them go. I cast against the current and suddenly the dun dropped and



I struck. The fish started an incredible run against the water, so I couldn't do anything but loosen the line.

First it looked like a rainbow trout, but the fight was slightly different. The fish stayed on the bottom and at first I had no idea what it was. It turned out to be a male grayling about 38 cm long, with my little dun hooked near the root of the first dorsal fin ray; fortunately I had size 0.10 mm nylon at the end so I finally managed to overcome it. I tried fishing for a while more, but because the weather didn't look like it was going to get better, I figured it would be of more use to finish the poultry in the warmth rather than being out in the rain and cold.

When the gentlemen started coming back from fishing on the Vltava, the house was already properly heated and full of the smell of dinner. We made so much cabbage that it filled the sink, but half of it was left over as well as a roll of dumplings. The poultry, however, vanished instantly and I was happy to be able to try a piece of the second duck because we portioned the goose first and I had no chance to get any. Also, Jirka from Volary came - last year he wouldn't stop talking and suggested that I had pulled down my weekend house and built a supermarket instead. This year he brought four packs of wood chips for making fire, drank only cola and was a completely different man.

We also talked about the visible decrease of olive mayflies in the Vltava, but nobody could figure out what the cause was. There might be multiple causes - maybe the obvious decrease of the water crowfoot population as a result of rampant water tourism, little water in the river, communal pollution or drainage from ameliorated land? We didn't find any certain answer, so the topic of conversation spun like a compass needle at the pole. It seems some concerns are exaggerated, but how long will the fish remain in the river without their common everyday food? And if there's no fish in the river, there will be no kingfisher and also no otter.

On Sunday morning I got up after seven and I began making breakfast. The guys from Vyšší Brod helped me make the fire and then everybody got up. We cracked thirty five eggs, chopped onion and ham and the kitchen smelled so good that even friends from remote parts of the house appeared. After breakfast and coffee, a big cleaning spree broke out and everybody got involved; some were very happy that their wives couldn't see them as they would have certainly been dumbstruck with amazement.

Nobody shirked and so we made a group photograph after ten o'clock, then the guys stuck one fly each into my collection hanging in the room and

headed for the water. The weather was better than the day before and the sun even came out from time to time. I finished the repairs on my fence, trimmed the branches on the trees and made a record in our anglers' chronicle.

It was past one and I started to get ready, but again there was a dilemma about where to go. Two cars were parked by the Soumarský bridge, so I struck out through the woods. There was another car by the sign below the camp, so I went again to Dobrá. I stopped about a kilometre below the grange and somebody was there too. I saw two anglers nymphing down the current. I wanted to go above them but just then they turned and pushed me on ahead.

Further on I found a nice spot where I got a couple of nice grayling, when Jaja passed by on the bank followed by Vladimir. I hadn't recognized them in the distance before. Now they were heading for places where I knew were really big grayling. It was overcast and an unpleasant wind was blowing, obstructing my work with my size 2 rod. I hadn't been in this area for many years so I slowly got reacquainted.



Fresh otter slots could be seen on a sandbank. The otter is a common inhabitant of the river here. There are so many fish in the main stream that the otter doesn't interfere, but when it makes a trip into one of the tributaries, it becomes a fright for all living things there. These brooks, which serve as trout breeding areas, suffer the most from otter raids and are often decimated.

I hadn't yet managed to photograph the slots when an emerald green kingfisher flew past me. The otter and the kingfisher are in a way food competitors, even though the quarry of the kingfisher is mostly fingerlings of grayling and dace. The otter, on the other hand, can also enjoy the young of these birds and some even claim that half of their nests can be destroyed every year.

In a deep pool with a bush near the left bank I found two spots where there were grayling and I got five of them. These were fish of around 35 cm and all of them were enticed by little grey duns. I then moved on a short stretch and in another pool grayling showed themselves near the right bank. I pulled out two of them and then noticed that behind a rock near the opposite right bank a small circle had formed. It was typical big grayling habitat, so I tied a size 0.08 mm nylon tippet on the end of the leader and took a "nobody dun"

out of my box. The first cast was exceptionally good and the fish took the fly without hesitation. I struck and it was clear that it was nothing small. The rod arched and something slowly headed for the middle of the deep pool.

My joy didn't last long though, and I didn't find out why the grayling got off the hook. Of course, for an angler a lost fish is always from the biggest category, and this case pointed to the probability that the grayling hadn't been hooked in the mouth. I recollected a many-year-old story, when I, not far from the Lenora crossing, hooked a fish on a little fly and the fish remained still for maybe half a minute in one place at the bottom and then got off for no obvious reason, leaving just one scale on the hook.

A short distance above me I saw Jaja, who suddenly appeared there like a ghost, caught a nice grayling and vanished again. As I found out later, he had discovered my spot with big grayling and got some on a dry fly. I, in exchange, caught one much bigger grayling right in the spot where my friend had disappeared ten minutes before. I didn't feel like going on and so returned to the stretch where I had seen guys out earlier in the afternoon, and I really liked it there. In one spot a big grayling attacked my fly but I somehow didn't manage to set the hook.

It was about half past four and the rising stopped completely and so I wanted to try a nymph. My first cast to a deep pool in a bend under a bush was rather just a test, but such a fierce take came that I lost my top nymph; after thinking a bit I was almost sure it was a forgotten rainbow trout. I hadn't had luck catching them this year and had lost all of them on thin tippets. Another half hour of nymphing brought just one little grayling, so I assumed it was completely fished out there and had no choice but to leave.

By the time I tottered from the water, made it to the car and changed into my normal clothes, the sun had set. It was a beautiful weekend; there aren't many such weekends in a year these days. I stopped at the pub "U Němečka" where all my friends were sitting, shining with satisfaction, especially since they could cool themselves with some beer. Němeček's huge dog begged food from the guests, and smelled very well that in my basket I had some smoked ham which Kadas had cut into pieces that morning without giving it a thought. I secretly gave everyone a slice of meat with a piece of bread and felt like St. Peter feeding his disciples.





## *The Last Ringing* **The Last Ringing (2004)**

The third October weekend attracted me again to the Šumava Mountains, because the weather forecast was still very optimistic. This time, I set out as late as Saturday morning and I didn't regret it. On the way, views of hilly, forested countryside with a touch of light morning mist opened ahead of me. After arrival at my weekend house in Stögerova Huť near Volary, I wanted to pick plums from the two trees in the garden, but there was nothing there. Unknown "helpers" had already managed to harvest them right before me, exactly like the year before. Never mind, climbing trees is not as big a hobby for me as it used to be when I was younger.



In the next set of riffles by the bank about 150 m upstream, I lifted and caught two more average fish, proving my assumptions right. By the right bank, the stream turned into a deeper pool full of fallen leaves and foam, so I couldn't really see my little Grey Dun in it. To make sure, I raised the rod a little in the best place, and on the surface a beautiful grayling rolled. If I had struck a second later, it could have been mine, but this way I only surprised it, sending it down somewhere in the deep stream.

Just about 10 metres above, the stream runs into a pool, and right above the inflow a thick branch lay in the water where grayling could gather. And of course they were there. Two average ones under the branch caused no problems, but I struck twice in vain above the branch. I put on the smallest that was at hand - the miraculous Slavoj's Dun - and carefully sent it to the stream. The grayling rose and was mine. It twisted on the 0.08 mm nylon and wanted to head for the branches, but thanks to my size 3 Sage rod I managed to lead it out of their reach without losing it. It was already in violet garb, even though it lacked two centimetres under forty.

I had two more good quarries in difficult places by the left bank, and I slowly approached a place with fallen broken spruce - known as the place

where the biggest grayling gather. The clear sunny sky was not the best invitation for catching, but shade from the high forest ruled here. I trusted myself, and knew I would catch one of the fish grandfathers. I only regretted the fact that I had just run out of the last length of my favourite 0.08 mm size nylon, and had to change to 0.10 mm. I had been expecting this already for some time, and it came at the least suitable moment.



I bent a little by the left bank and fine-tuned the end-tippet when a big grayling rose, followed by another not far above. I tied on the miraculous dun again, and cast it on the water surface not far from the place where the first fish had risen. A small speck of wings floated on the water with the clearly visible tippet alongside it. Suddenly, the dun disappeared in a grayling circle and I struck carefully thinking for sure that the hook would be set, but it wasn't. The big grayling recognized the trap at the last moment, and my second attempt ended the same way. It came up to look at the dun two more times, and then lost interest.

I was sure it was due to the 0.10 mm nylon, and regretted I didn't have my size 2 rod with me that day. I had left at home because I had been thinking about some nymphing, for which the thinner rod is too gentle. I pulled out my bobbin of size 0.06 mm nylon and tied it to 0.10 mm nylon from the same recognized manufacturer. I didn't want to lose Slavoj's fly, not to mention that it had already become pretty well known to the fish. So, I tied on a tiny CDC Para Dun and sent it again to the fish, which had calmed down a little bit in the meantime. Right after the cast, a take came so unexpectedly that I struck a bit more than gently, and the line tore like it was made of paper.

"So, we have this down", I thought and moved squatting to another tentative grayling. But there was no way to get it to take anything. It would rise from time to time, but didn't react to duns at all. Finally I dug a size 20 Grizzly Orange Tag out of my box, which always worked great with the biggest fish here. The sun was shining and the beams



were falling through the trees into the pool, so I suddenly saw a big, long fish under my fly, which suddenly stopped about twenty centimetres below the water surface before disappearing in the dark. It was another 40 cm sized fish, which had come to see what was floating there and recognized the possible danger in time. I walked a little upstream and wanted to try the 0.06 mm nylon again. It still tore like paper even with a lot of much smaller fish - I put it away as it was usable only for bleak.

Behind the next bend I came across two more fishers and when I walked around them and started back to the water I noticed one more. I toiled again through the high sedge fields and came back to the river in a place suitable only for nymphing. I tried for a while, but the desired results didn't appear. I continued on to some places where there are usually no giants, but sometimes a surprise occurs. One of them is a prolonged pool which has a shallow part in its lower section, divided from the pool itself by a low rapid. There are grayling everywhere, but just average in size and today wasn't any different.

Halfway down the pool a rising fish was traversing, but I was so careless that I didn't read it right and it didn't do me any favours. It was a forgotten rainbow trout and it broke through my 0.10 mm nylon like a raspberry. I managed to outwit two grayling by the left bank and so I arrived at the beginning of the pool, where something was rising in an unusual place in the depth behind a branch. First, I focused on smaller grayling at the mouth of the pool and I managed to get two of them. I didn't really feel like drying my fly with miniballs, so I sent it as it was just behind the branch, where the fish took it right under the surface. It was a nice dace, and in a short while I took about seven of them from this place on a sunken dun.

Five o'clock was just around the corner, and there was no sense in walking further on up the water. It was something over hundred metres to get to the next big grayling pool, and I didn't want to get there at the last moment. Maybe I will get there next year, we'll see. I set out back down the water and cast only at a few places which were easily accessible. This brought me one 35 cm sized fish and a couple of smaller grayling. Then I realized that I hadn't come across any brownie this year. It must have been because I had mainly fished below Dobrá, where they only rarely show themselves. Even so, after a couple of bad years, it was an autumn like one from the old good times. If only the number of little duns had risen...





## *The end of a season* **The end of a season on the Warm Vltava (2005)**

The end of my 2005 fly fishing season was a bit in vain, but actually the previous couple of years had been pretty much the same. I leave fishing in the cold to the young, and rather take care of my health somewhere warm. That year I also didn't manage our annual Šumava stag party, since it coincided with All Saint's Day – an occasion when it's necessary to take the family to visit relatives, those both living and dead, for a bit of talk.

In addition, some unknown melioration workers had ruined my mood by totally destroying the Jedlový (Spruce) brook once again. The brook runs past my weekend house in Stögerova Hut near Volary. I thought they had

I was finally out of the water and dry. I pushed through the snow upstream to where an ice floe extended out into the pool. I tested its thickness and found it could support me. I proceeded step by step and saw fresh otter footprints in the snow on the edge.

Standing on the ice about three metres from the bank I cast my small nymphs into the pool, trying to work with them. My anticipation built up again and after a strike the line began to move. It was quite clear that it wasn't a grayling, but rather a spotted beauty appeared by the floe – a two-palms-long trout. Nothing happened for a while, but then I was suddenly leading something heavy and cool-headed rushing right under the floe. I tried to land it, but it was only a piece of an old, sunken branch.

Then it was about half past two and suddenly the icy crust on the line no longer formed. I dared to creep out almost all the way to the edge of the current, just an otter footprint away, and sent my nymphs into a deeper hole. A quick jerk indicated another take and this time it was a fish. A grayling of about 32 cm tried to rush into the current, so I attempted to stop it and in a minute I was holding it in my hand. I carefully let it go into the water which must have been only about a half a degree.



For a while I looked for its friends because this fish couldn't have been there alone, but no one else seemed interested. As time passed I became braver and braver on the floe, walking on it in search of the best spot for fishing. Then another indication of a take and something heavy was at the end of the rod. I fought with it for a moment and suddenly a rock the size of a fist rose to the surface. The hook had got caught in a small crack as if it were the mouth of a clam. The crust began to form on the line again and my watch showed a quarter till three. "That could be enough for this year" I said to myself, and I was happy that my ice floe didn't betray me and I didn't get to know the joy reserved every year for the hardy swimmers on New Year's Day in the Vltava in Prague.



## *Evening recollection*

### **Evening recollection (2006)**

It was almost the end of June and the weather on this particular Saturday was finally good. I was driving to my old cottage near to Volary with two aims. First I wanted to watch the spring-round of the Czech second fly-fishing league and second I wanted to mow the grass around the cottage. I had not taken much care of this place during the last five years. I used it mainly as a place just for the fall grayling expeditions. This was the June duty visit to remove the overgrown grass.

Though I had my fly-fishing equipment in the car, I did not believe I would even unpack it. I had been cutting the grass with a scythe all the morning, and

then I took a ride to the Warm Vltava above Lenora. The above-mentioned fly-fishing event was going on there. The weather was beautiful, lots of fish were being caught, nobody argued and it all made me really happy. I got back to the cottage after six o'clock and my fishing enthusiasm started to slowly disappear. I doubted if there was any sense in doing any more fishing. After a good dinner however I decided to go and although it was after seven o'clock I started to drive in the direction of Lenora. I did not know where to go.

I passed the crossing to Soumarský bridge and followed the railway against the setting sun. At the railway crossing close to Lenora I parked the car and started to change and prepare my fishing rod. I was looking at the poster map of the Vlata 33P fishing ground, which was not far from the railway. Something seemed strange to me and looking closer I found that the board was damaged in two places. Probably, it had been used as a target for someone throwing stones from the railway embankment. I recalled how much work it was to raise money for these map boards and how much effort it took to encourage fishermen from Volary to install them. My good spirit evaporated.

Directly at the riverside I found an old yellow Skoda car wreck. This really annoyed me and I went closed to see into it. It appeared that this wreck was still roadworthy, and the fishing equipment inside, showed that it was owned by a fisherman. They had driven right up to the riverbank. I was angry thinking, why could they not have walked the final 200 m to get here.

Just being curious I looked at the water. Close to the riverbank, and on the other side a big fish was rising. I could not believe it. So I waited a while and suddenly I saw a couple of grayling mouths and then again – big fish hunting! The decision about where to fish this evening had been made for me.

I walked about one hundred metres against the stream, and set up with 0.12 diameter breaking strain and tied on a Black CDC Sedge with a grey wing, on a size 14 hook. I followed the water and looked for the circles made by rising fish. On the left riverbank the grayling rose and took with confidence. I set the hook and the grayling started to roll around on the bottom. The fight was short and much too one sided. The cock was waving with his colourful back fin, and then he lay on his side. The right corner of his mouth was damaged, from some fight with another fisherman previously. I estimated he could be about 35 cm long and released him.

My sedge was all dirty, covered with the slime. I replaced it and continued down the water to the little pool. Fish were rising ahead of me, so I sent her



my greetings. Right after the fly landed on the surface, a 20 cm brown trout stood up and showed me his beautiful taper. The fly was all wet and I had to dry it for a little while before I cast it to another circle. It was just a small trout again. I lost two other flies this way before I reached the fallen trunk. The trunk lay in the water diagonally to the riverbank and in the little pool behind it something was going on.

I cast my line across the trunk, the fly was swimming in the stream and suddenly, it sank. I thought it was all wet and tried to lift it carefully from the water. Suddenly I saw that the line did not lift behind my back, but the line was going against me. There was no fly on the line. At the right bank of the river the mysterious fish showed himself again. I quickly lined up my last sedge. The fish was rising on the left bank of the river where it is no wider than ten metres.

I placed my fly in his way and let it drift into the field of vision on the unknown fish.

A savage attack followed. After hooking the big dark trout, it jumped twice on the surface and tried to escape. I was not one hundred percent sure which trout it was and I was really curious about what I had caught. My five weight Sage rod balanced all the attempts of the fish to escape, and soon I saw the fish



right below the surface of the water. For local conditions, a very nice rainbow trout, with full-grown fins, fighting for its life. I took my camera from the jacket to document those unforgettable moments and the release button a couple of times. Then I killed my first fish of the year. The fish measured 35 cm and his stomach was full of sedges and I found a residue of small fish, maybe little grayling or dace – it was not possible to recognise what they used to be.

I felt sorry for the rainbow trout. It was a beautifully marked cock, but I had to kill him because wild rainbow should be taken away. At least one reason for me, in fact I was fighting inside to give him his freedom or not. Because there are not so many, such beautiful fish any more. Finally the genes from the primeval hunter to kill his quarry won. To keep releasing fish is a little demotivating anyway. We just have this coded in our genes.

It was getting dark and I saw many grayling circles around, but I did not have any suitable sedge left. I tried similar samples, bigger, smaller, but other

than small brownies, I did not catch anything any more. Grayling started to rise on some petite flies but they did not show any interest in my upwing flies. Even when I changed the nylon down to about 0.10 mm diametre. From time



to time the fish showed a passing interest but it was not possible to hook them. I also came on a shoal of dace and they nibbled my flies for a while until I worked out what they were.

Around nine in the evening the grayling stopped rising. I heard some voices behind the curve of the river, and saw a man from the yellow Skoda car. "It was fishing today, wasn't?" he bellowed and crossed the river a couple of metres above me. I pretended

I did not see him, because I did not want to ruin such a nice evening. I did not think he would react to my comments anyway. I was just glad that the water had entered my right boot, and I was not completely wet. It gave me an excuse.

Just a short toot of the train crossing the road, disturbed the quietness of this evening. A mild summer night was coming and I knew this was my last fly. I would not be able to see another one. And suddenly I recalled a feeling and I remembered where I had felt the same feeling.

Six years ago I was fishing here with my colleague – a fisherman from Australia. He wrote a couple of fishing travelogue books. He did not forget to mention that evening in one of them. The evening when the surface of the river was full of rising grayling, and he had such a beautiful fish on a dry Blue Dun. Unfortunately, Chris Hole passed away two years ago. We will not see each other at the World Fly-fishing Championships in the Snowy Mountains any more.

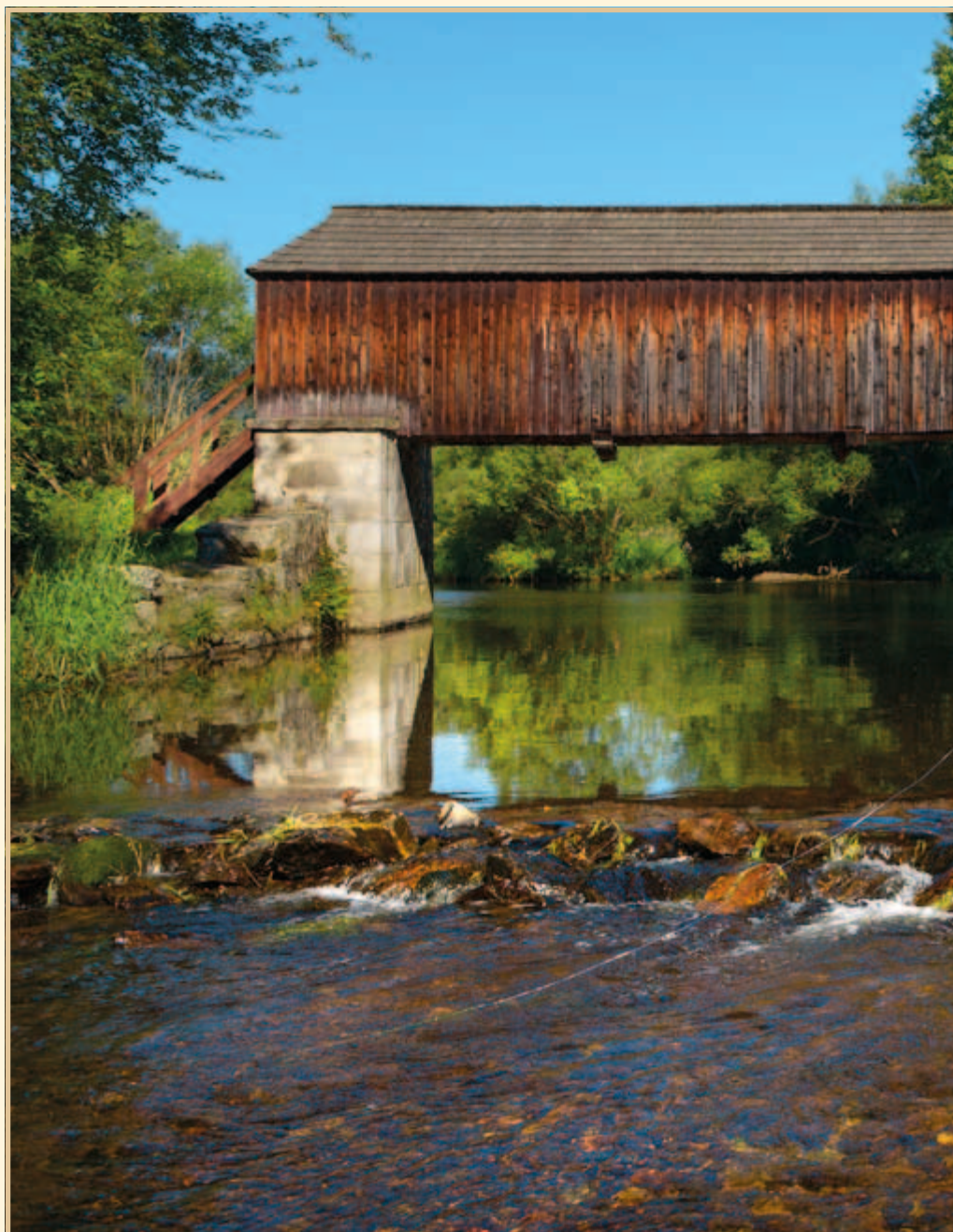
In the edge of the stream, a bigger brown trout appeared finally, and I tried to get him. The sedge was floating above his lie and I was waiting for the take which was not coming. The last fly got stuck, somewhere on the branch above me, and everything was over. With thoughts about Chris, I was leaving the river. I probably should come to the Volary more often...



## *Sad trout* **Sad trout (2006)**

It was a hot day in July when my wife and I arrived at our weekend house near Volary. Another weekend of cleaning and tidying awaited us, one of those that only such old, long-uninhabited buildings may offer their owners. We hadn't really come here much during the past ten years and so we decided this year to put everything in order. My task this day was to paint the hallway white, and my wife kept busy with constant tidying and cleaning.

Today's family brigade-work is a continuation in a series of previous such events, including the two July holidays. Of course I had my fishing gear in my car this time too, but just for peace of the soul I didn't really believe I would









On the way back through Dobrá we slowed down to take a closer look at the police dog, which was still lying in the doorway of the pub. I accelerated a bit as I approached the dog. It immediately reacted... jumped upright like a spring, caught up with us and ran beside us for a short distance. This time however, it didn't beat our car's panels with its paw, but only barked loudly as it chased us down the road.

On Wednesday we planned another trip to the Warm Vltava. The river had finally dropped to near normal level, as it hadn't rained for nearly two days, and it should now be ideal for fishing. It was up to the group to decide where they wanted to fish today. Those that had little luck during the two previous days chose to fish the Vltava downstream from Lipno and the Malše River. Three other fishermen (including Rob) chose to fish the upper Vltava, since it had fished so well on Monday. We decided to skip lunch and would be fishing for the entire day. I positioned one fisherman downstream of Lenora; the second at the Soumarský Bridge; and I took Rob to the railway stop in Dobrá.

We put on our gear and made a long hike back upstream, walking through the meadows toward the river. I decided to use Milan's French leader with a spiral indicator, which turned out to be a very wise choice, as we only saw one fish rise during the entire day. We barely saw another sole on the water, which made us feel as if we were truly alone in the wilderness of the Šumava Mountains.

I carefully made my way across the river near a shallow riffle that was above an undercut bank. I cast an Olive Nymph into the riffle, and when I lifted my rod I felt the resistance of a grayling that was around 38 centimeters in length. This was a good indication that yesterday's flies would be just as productive for today, but the lower water levels would require a slightly finer tippet. A few minutes later I landed yet another large grayling on my Black Nymph, while Rob was also having good success with the same pattern.

For about fifty meters I hadn't felt a touch. I eventually found some nice fish and caught two larger grayling that were about 40 cm in length. Rob was still ahead of me, slowly working his way toward a deep pool near river's bend. I was startled when I heard him shout: "It's a real big fish!" His rod bent over like a bow. Suddenly a silvery fish jumped clear out of the water. From where I stood, I could tell that it was definitely not a grayling, but was a forgotten rainbow trout. Rob fought the fish for a while and sounded a bit disappointed when he announced that it was "just a rainbow." He admired

the fish for a moment before releasing it back into the deep pool.

We were working our way toward another productive hole, when we spotted a large grayling rising a little further downstream, beside a large boulder. Not wanting to change my setup to dry flies for just one fish, I moved into a better position and cast my nymphs to the opposite bank. The water was flowing slowly, so I had to keep lifting



my flies in order to avoid hooking the bottom. During the first drift I didn't connect with the fish, but on the second drift I felt a gentle tug and struck to see if it was a fish. The spiral indicator stretched ever so slightly while a large male grayling jumped clear out of the water. It was a prime specimen that was 40 cm long and in perfect condition. I was pleasantly surprised by its size, while Rob asked in disbelief: "Why is it that you manage to catch only the bigger fish?"

We walked to another promising stretch of the river, where Rob hooked several grayling in a back-eddy beside a pool. He seemed a bit disappointed as they were primarily smaller fish. I cast my nymphs to the left bank and held my fly rod high, which kept most of my leader off the water. Several times I raised and lowered the rod tip, and eventually another 40 cm grayling took my nymph. It flared its large dorsal fin and used the current to its advantage during the battle. Upon closer examination I observed that it had been hooked on the bottom, outside edge of its mouth, which seemed rather suspicious.

We spooked a school of bleaks that had come from the Lipno reservoir to spawn in the river - they were a bit of a nuisance at times. As we approached the second bend in the river, the water behind it began to boil once again. We moved into position, and I had a strike in the riffle that I was working. I felt the weight of a large grayling as I lifted my rod, and set the hook.

I went another thirty meters and cast to the left bank beneath the tree branches. I gently twitched my flies during the drift. Suddenly my rod buckled over repetitively as a large male took the nymph. Once the fish came to my hand I paused to admire it before its release. It was at this moment that I saw that the fish was also hooked in the bottom; outside edge of its mouth. This confirmed that it was indeed no coincidence, as I concluded that these

two fish were trying to take the Black Nymph and had been unintentionally hooked by the point fly hook when I raised my fly rod.

My percentage of larger fish versus smaller fish was still troubling Rob, as he was primarily catching the smaller grayling. This was largely due to the fact that I by-passed the areas of the river where the smaller grayling were commonly found and focused on locations where I knew the larger fish should be found, and was using more effective patterns.

Our time on the river was nearly over, so we increased our walking speed in order to cover more water. We eventually reached a pool where the larger grayling tend to congregate. I decided to put on a little show for my friend, so I waded out into the river and moved into the best possible location. "This spot is perfect!" I thought to myself. I worked my nymphs in that spot for about five minutes without any luck, while Rob had caught two smaller grayling a little further upstream. I was surprised that I hadn't experienced a strike, so I reworked the same stretch of water a second time.

Rob had no clue that we had just passed through a potential "bonanza" of grayling and had carried on his way, while I assessed what I had done wrong or should have possibly done different. It surely couldn't be my decision to fish with nymphs, and the fish were definitely in this location. I decided to return to the same pool that I had fished only a few minutes ago. As I stood examining the water, I tried a few casts in the shallows and calm water where I had been standing earlier. Three seconds later a 40 centimeter male grayling took my nymph, and a small female grayling took the same nymph a few casts later. Rob and I were both amazed by our success. I told him: "Today's fishing you will remember forever, as there are only few such days in our lives!"

We picked up our pace and kept moving. I hooked another large grayling as we waded through a very shallow riffle, and missed a nice fish in the tail-out of a long pool. We came to a "100% guaranteed" spot, where I tried to predict another big fish. Rob told me that he hadn't caught anything yet and about the spots that he had tried, which seemed to have been fished-out. He was correct in his assumption, because behind the next bend we could see the railway bridge near Dobrá, which marked the end of the best fishing spots.

Next we found a promising piece of water that I was certain would hold a few larger fish. We spread out and began to search for them. Five minutes later I felt a strike as I lifted my fly rod... it was a very big hen fish! Around the bend there was another prime piece of water, but we didn't manage to



catch anything in it, nor in the adjacent pool. I was twitching the fly rod like an old man while leading the flies through a shallow area of the river, which Rob had walked through only a minute earlier. He watched from a distance and wondered if a big grayling might be present and if it could resist the temptations of my Black Nymph.

I relied on my years of experience and extensive knowledge of fly fishing, but without the aid of my French leader and spiral indicator, I wouldn't have caught anything in this water. Unfortunately, in my excitement and haste I forgot about a tree that was on the bank behind me, which consumed my very last Black Nymph. It was a clear message from St. Peter that I was done for the day. My only regret was that we never had the opportunity to fish the large spillway that was near railway bridge crossing. In the past I have never caught anything special there, but this particularly beautiful place has always attracted me and I have always wanted to uncover its secrets...



my pocket (where I stored my car keys) was empty! I couldn't believe that I had lost my keys, as I had been wearing my chest waders and my keys had never fallen out of my pockets... but I suppose that there is a first time for everything. This was the beginning of the ending of a near perfect day on the water. Much later on, and with a bit of help from a friend, I arrived back at my house just a little after 9:00 p.m.

The next day I returned to Lenora to search for my lost car keys, which should have been easy to spot, as they had a half meter strand of blue nylon



cord attached to them. Around lunch time I finally gave up and began fishing. I chose to use a dry fly, but that ended up being a poor decision, as there were only a few small grayling within the pool near the camp. In hind-sight I should have known better, as I was fully aware of the fact that the fish would be more responsive to lightly-weighted nymphs before 2:00 pm. But still, I stubbornly waited for the dry fly fishing to improve, as I desperately wanted to experience the joy of catching a large grayling on a dry fly at least one more time before hanging up my fly rod for the long cold winter break!

At 2:00 pm, I drove across the railroad tracks at Lenora and walked down to the pool where only a week ago I had been fishing with a dry fly. I looked down to see several grayling that were rising, but not one of them was larger than 30 centimeters in length. In the end I managed to persuade four of them, as well as a small brown trout, to accept my offering. I continued on my way and walked about a kilometer of the river, but couldn't manage to find any other fish that were rising. The end of the fishing season didn't quite match up to my expectations, but as they say: "life goes on".

The setting sun cast an eerie orange glow and long shadows across the picturesque, autumn landscape, as I said a heartfelt good-bye to my beloved river and its fish. But as my heart was saying a fond farewell, my mind was already busy planning and dreaming of next year's adventures on the Warm Vltava..



## *In Praise of Quils* **In Praise of Quils (2010)**

I opened this year's fly-fishing season on the Warm Vltava River on June 6 when I went there for a trip with participants of the 2010 Czech Nymphing Masterclass. We had beautiful spring weather and clear skies with only a small cloud from time to time. The water level elevated prospects for very good fishing. Rob and I went to my beat located a short distance from Dobrá village; However, although we caught several fish, the catch was by no means as good the previous year.

After about an hour trying various methods we decided to climb the right side of the river and to move to another good section of river that flowed through Schulze's meadow. The bank was relatively high and de-

scended steeply into the water. I cast nymphs from time to time as I moved along the bank, but I could not catch anything. So, I reverted to my tried and tested summer rig with a small goldhead black nymph on the point and a small beige Czech nymph on the dropper.

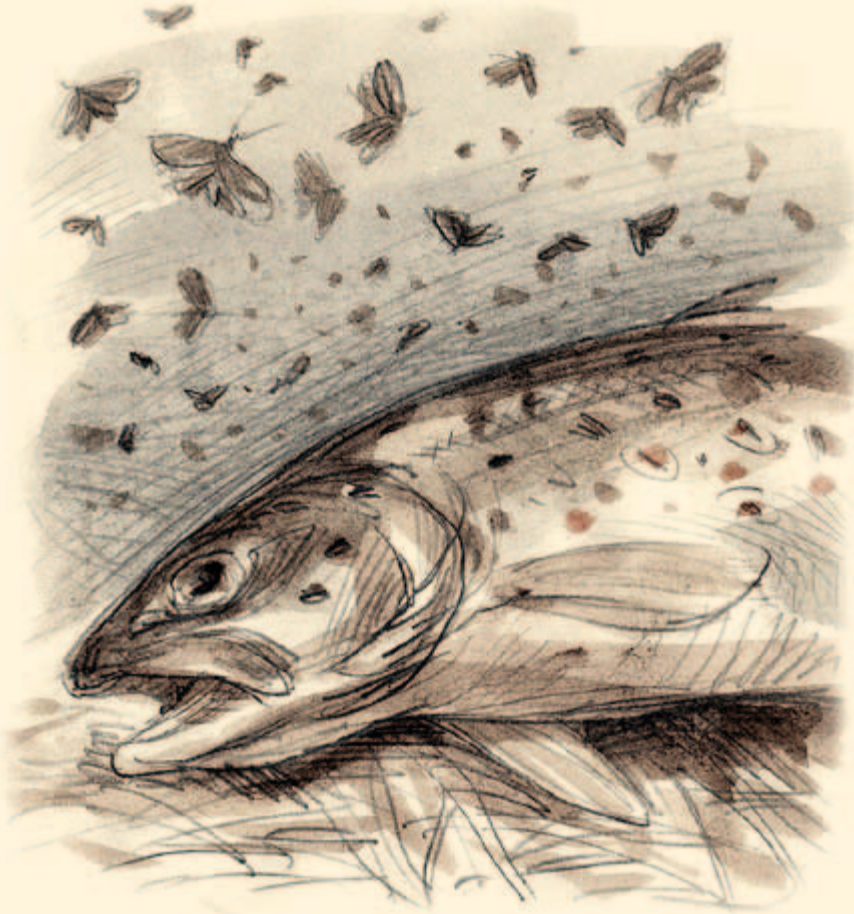
Suddenly it seemed to me that a small circle had appeared on the water surface at a very good place, only a short way from the river bank. I could not swear on it, but I stopped and observed the water attentively. I sat down on the bank and thought whether I should change to dry fly. But it was still long before noon, and so it seemed too soon to me. The biggest grayling stay in those places and I did not want to alarm my possible catch. I waited for another rise, but nothing happened.

After approximately five minutes, I could not wait any more and lowered my nymphs into places where the small circle had probably been. The small point nymph was on 0.10 mm and the small Bobesh had the "tie" on only two hundredths millimeter stronger nylon. I held the spiral strike indicator in chartreuse colour closely above the water surface and waited to see what would happen.

I cast the line and brought my nymphs just to the steep and stony bank. The indicator hovered above the water motionlessly and I rised the rod tip only a bit, striking blind. And it did not go. My size 3 Sage XP rod bent and its tip pointed into the stream. Nothing happened for a while, and so I pressed a little harder on the rod. Double wiggle was the response, and then the completely stretched indicator started moving slowly upstream. It is there!

The fish kept track of the bank for a while more and then it started moving through the strong stream across the river. I had to loosen the fly line to it, because even increased pressure on the rod did not force it to rise from the river bed. I was very tense and waited for the grayling to emerge near the surface. For a long time it did not emerge, but then the purple fish came up several times below the surface, and I saw the huge dark red dorsal fin of an old Vltava male.

That alone could have been enough for me to be happy because it was obviously a very extraordinary fish. But I wished very strongly that it would stay for a while more on my barbless hook. Therefore, I called to Rob who observed everything from a distance, and after several tries I finally pulled my camera from my vest pocket. The Dutchman had my old Olympus in his hands for the first time and it was not easy for him to understand my



instructions quickly because its mechanism has its bugs. Rob took some snaps quickly and then waited for me to pull the fish out from the water.

I had to observe both my catch and the photographer, but I managed it. Finally I pulled the tired grayling to the bank and tried to grasp it with my free left hand - I had not been carrying fishing net for a long time. I did not succeed for a while, and then the hook of the dropper nymph cut into my finger and the fish nearly came off the fine end nylon. So I pressed the grip of the rod in my armpit, pulled the hook out of my finger with my freed right hand and then lifted the grayling above the surface with my both hands.



My feet slipped at that moment and I slid into the water almost up to my waist, but I did not let the fish go. Using my rod as a guide, I estimated that it was 43 cm long, and returned the fish to the water. Rob took several photos and told me that he had not seen such a big grayling in his life. I was happy to believe him.

With only a month remaining to the end of summer, I mowed the grass at my cottage at Stögrova Huť and then spent the afternoon most unsuccessfully mushrooming in the woods under the Jedlová (Fir) Mountain - I almost got stuck as well when the foresters locked the barriers forcing me to undertake a difficult alternate track out that was normally only used by tractors. I had to drive “by feel” while the bottom of my Ford scraped the high points in the middle of the path. I fully expected to get stuck or to puncture the oil sump, but emerged safely.

Delighted to have completed the day’s “rally”, my mind turned to trout. I’d almost forgotten how good a brownie could taste, so I set out to Lenora to catch one. It was shortly before 7 p.m. when I stopped at the confluence of the Teplá Vltava and the Grassy Vltava rivers. The sun was still above the hills and a balmy evening was on the cards. The plan was simple. I would first test the fish with nymphs and, when the evening rise started, I would change to dries.

At the confluence pool I was surprised to find a new notice announcing that no fishing was allowed there. Somebody had managed to get the authorities to ban summer fishing for a kilometre above the confluence, including a third of the beautiful pool. I did not like the restriction too much, but I did catch some small and medium grayling there nevertheless.

I had pinned far more hopes on the pool below the small bridge; the trout were nowhere to be seen at the time and I only caught some small grayling and dace. Waiting for my time to come I moved downstream. The sun had already set, but, since visibility was still very good, I stuck to my nymphing tactics, catching the odd small trout or medium-sized grayling.

I was some 800 metres downstream of the confluence, having passed the point where the river bounced from the rocky bedrock to the left, when I saw a nice circle just before a stone near the opposite bank. The river was only some 10 metres wide there and deep just to the knees, so you must be very careful not to alarm your fish. I quickly climbed the left bank, changed the reel with floating line and was about to change the fly. But the nylon had

a diameter of 0.14 mm on the end of the leader, and that was too thick for that situation.

Suddenly it started getting dark and I could not find the nylon twelve in my vest pocket; I could only touch the ten. It could not be helped; I had to put the nylon 0.10 mm and tried to tie it together with the fourteen on the end of the ready leader. A young boy would have succeeded right away, but the fingers of the young pensioner did not want to obey, and my eyes refused to obey in the dark. I raged noiselessly and repeated the well known procedure again and again, and constantly had to return to point zero. I do not know how long it took, but it seemed like eternity to me. The only comfort I had was that the fish continued to rise regularly before the stone, and did not stop even when I had the knot finally made.

Now the question emerged as to which fly to tie. It was very dark and I did not know what the fish were eating at the moment. I would not succeed in hackling a small mayfly in such darkness, so I took a Hairy Caddis on a size 14 hook from my box, with a bigger eyelet. I succeeded in passing the nylon on the third try and made the knot with about the same speed.

