

Italian travels and Piave River Fishing in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

The excitement was building as 2009 progressed toward August. My wife and I had been planning for our two months in Europe and everything was coming together nicely. Logistics on a longer trip occupy a lot of time and research took months prior to actually departing.

We used a travel agent for international flights and some accommodation bookings but generally we like to find alternative choices for our specific needs. Three weeks in Paris in 2 separate apartments, one in the Marais on the right bank and one in The Latin Quarter on the left, in the right location with the right inclusions, took some finding.

You are always a little apprehensive on what you will find when you get there.

Dealing directly with owners or local agent representatives, and only paying small deposits is the key to a successful result. Prepaying for the accommodation and the substantial bond, up front, that some agencies require, is fraught with future difficulties.

We had previously hired a car for four weeks in Italy, and had no hesitation in selecting that mode of transport again. Hertz were good to deal with and

prepaying in Australia resulted in a very reasonable rate for our compact Fiat.

We picked up the car in Milan, drove throughout Italy and Slovenia for 2 weeks, and returned it to Marco Polo Airport in Venice, before flying to Athens and the Greek Islands for a couple of weeks.

The European Union has eliminated many borders, but a kind word of warning, expressway ownership is still very much controlled by the country you are visiting. If you do not purchase the necessary Vignette road tax sticker, which has replaced the road toll you previously paid on entering, then be prepared to pay a hefty fine when you exit that country.

This is diligently patrolled!

Roadside notices for this requirement are easily missed and hire car firms are not well versed in these needs. Check the web for each country you are visiting.

Be especially careful when driving from Italy to Slovenia and particularly when returning from Bled via a short section of expressway through Austria.

Venice and Lake Como were high on the agenda. Our little hotel at Marghera, one train stop outside Venice, with easy parking and a friendly owner was easy to return to after a previous visit in 2003.

Menaggio, half way up the western side of Lake Como proved to be a delightful location.

Convenient ferry travel opens up many locations on the lake.

Planning in some essential time for fly fishing in both Italy and Slovenia came fast on the heels of the successful tourist itinerary being devised.

Legitimate compensation, I felt, for my wife's Parisian indulgence in Paris. A wonderful city but one has to stand one's ground, while purposely wearing the fishing vest and waving the graphite stick, sometimes!

Where to fish, which guide, what equipment, how best to get there?

Fly fishing gives so many opportunities for liaisons with enthusiastic people of the same ilk and I was fortunate to have made good friends with an Italian couple, whilst Bonefishing in the Pacific on Christmas Island (Kiritimati Island in the Republic of Kiribati).

Alessandro and Arianna live in Rome and Alessandro pursues fly fishing with a passion. He enjoys his home waters for their wild trout stock.

Emails were exchanged and after seeing some photos of captures taken from the Piave River in the Venetian region of northern Italy it was not difficult to decide.



**The ultimate prize
Alessandro with a Marble Trout caught in the
Piave River in July 2008.**

Alessandro recommended a guide from Cortina d'Ampezzo and confirmed that he and Arianna would join us in Cortina for four days.

The guide ANGELO PILLER was contacted and the dates fixed.

(PILLER@pipam.com www.Flyfishitaly.com)
Angelo's fly fishing credentials are extensive and his service excellent. He speaks very good English and has been a fly fisher since 1986 covering Italian, Austrian and Slovenian rivers. Angelo ties his own flies and is a fly tying instructor at the Fly Fisher Club of Milan as well as a Certified EFFA and FFF Fly casting Instructor.

Experience in many other countries, including Canada, Iceland, United States Alaska, Germany, and Venezuela, means he brings a wealth of knowledge to the river.

Guide Costs were €220 for a 5 hour day with all gear provided if you require it.

Our intention was to fish the Piave River with the possibility of catching Marble trout and hybrids as well as Brown trout and Grayling.

Fishing licence costs are not included, and vary on the location you choose to fish.

A general National licence, covering a two week period is required, which costs approx. €10.00. County licence costs €1.00 and a daily licence, for the section of river you intend to fish, will cost between €12 and €20.

Angello arranged all licences.

I am repeatedly reminded when overseas how fortunate we are in Australia and New Zealand with our freedom and very reasonable licence costs.

Next was arranging our accommodation in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The Hotel Meuble Villa Neve provided a central location within walking distance from the town square and had car parking at the front door.

Angelo recommended this hotel. We booked on line for 4 nights @ €124 per night including breakfast.



Very welcome façade and reception.



Flowers Everywhere



Magnificent mountain backdrop.

Our first floor balcony, facing the street, gave us wonderful views almost directly along the town square which has the church steeple on one side while opposite are classic alpine style buildings, adorned with flower pots on all levels.

Located in the heart of the Dolomites in the Ampezzana valley at 1224m, Cortina is a popular winter sport resort known for its ski-ranges, scenery, accommodations, shops and après-ski scene and is home to some of the most prestigious names in fashion. Popular in both winter and summer for the socially conscious local and international visitor.

The encircling Dolomites are magnificent, providing skiing in winter and walking and fishing in summer. The highest peak towers an impressive 3244m.

Easily viewed from our balcony, the world famous ski runs cascade through the pine forest on the mountain flanks. These runs were host to the 1956 Winter Olympics and numerous Nordic and Alpine championships, world cup events and motion pictures.

One of the memorable James Bond stunt sequences in *For Your Eyes Only*, (1981) with gunners on spike-wheeled motorcycles chasing Roger Moore on skis, was filmed on its slopes, as were several scenes in the film *Cliffhanger*.

The Ampezzano climate is typically alpine, with long summers, and winters that vacillate between frigid, snowy, unsettled, and temperate.

Between the end of December and first of January of every year, some of the lowest temperatures recorded in Italy are in this region.

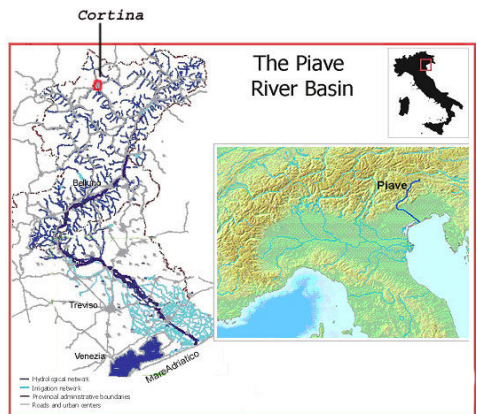
We had some rain at the end of August, but generally fine conditions with temperatures in the mid 20's C.

Roslyn and Arianna enjoyed exploring both Cortina and the many outlying locations.

Alessandro and I focused our attention on the Piave River system.

Cortina d'Ampezzo is located on the Bigontina River. This joins the Piave about 20km downstream of the town. The Piave River is the fifth most important river in Italy.

The area of the Piave basin is 4,100 sq. km, while the main course of the river is 220 km long. The basin has a population of approx. 400,000 inhabitants.



Interestingly, and not obvious to a casual visitor, the Piave River basin contains an artificial system of water resources built between 1920 and 1960, and is, in fact, an artificial hydrographic network placed over the natural system, feeding 22 hydroelectric power plants. This artificial river is composed of reservoirs, 6 big dams, 17 penstocks, tunnels, sluice gates and line canals, joining the Adriatic east of Venice. Some interesting and tragic events have shaped this region as a result, but I'll get to the fishing before detailing one such event.

The fly-fishing equipment I took:

- Rods: 9ft 5# Sage DS2.
9ft 6# Sage Zaxis
- Fly Lines: SA Sharkskin for both 5# & 6#
- Waders: NZ Riverworks...Full chest type.
- Wading Boots: Reflex Aqua Shoe.
Lightweight, with thick sole.
- Wading pole: borrowed one from Angelo.

Angelo was concerned that my rod should be suitable for Czech nymphing.

He preferred a medium action which protects the fine tippets he intended to use. It is not unusual for longer rods in 4 weight to be preferred.

He would have happily provided me with a rod and all other equipment, included in the guiding fee, so taking your own gear is not essential.

My Sage 5# was considered satisfactory.

The first day was to be my introduction to Czech Nymphing. I had witnessed this technique on the Murrumbidgee River during the Australian Fly Fishing Championships.

Czech Nymphing is so effective that fly fishers taking part in competitions cannot do without it.

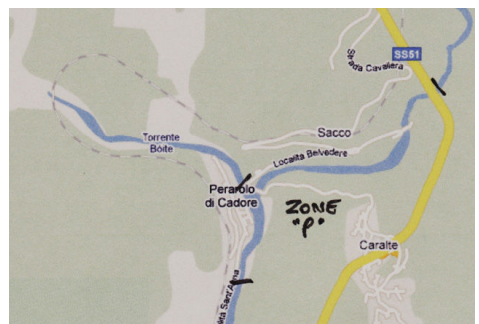
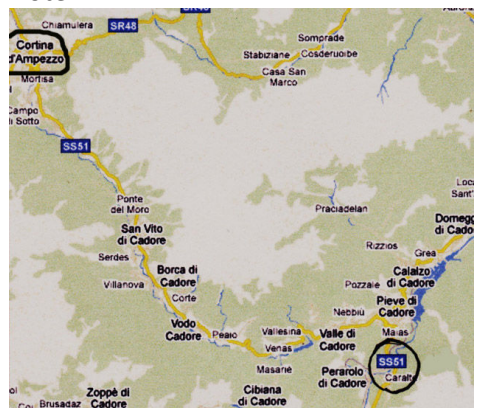
Originally the technique was known as Polish Nymphing before the Czechs adopted, and developed the style.

The Czechs also designed new flies and confirmed their endeavours by winning World Championships, so claiming ownership.

The Czech method is a close-up technique for rapids or fast moving stretches of turbulent water as the technique requires that the fisherman stands fairly close to where the fish are.

Essentially the nymphs must get down to where the fish are.

Angelo collected me for an afternoon session and we drove to Perarolo di Cadore. This was 40Km, (about 1hr), where we collected the licenses at the Hotel.



Google Maps showing the location

As an example of the licensing, the Permesso di Pesca "Zona Particolare" issued was for a very specific catch and release allocation of Zone "P".

This section was from a sign on a post on the river bank to the Major Traffic Bridge on SS51.

Angelo rigged my line for Czech nymphing as no surface action was taking place.

Although not allowed in competition he inserted a 300mm (1 ft) length of red nylon between fly line and leader. The leader was a straight 2.5m (8ft) of 2.5kg (6lb) affair.



My First Grayling.

In 90 minutes I had three species to the net.

The Grayling was an excellent fish.

These successes resulted from numerous fly changes in exploring the water column, particularly with tungsten headed nymphs, the heaviest being 4.5mm diameter.

Some Mayflies began appearing but not enough to raise the fish. Conditions were overcast with light rain showers and no sun.



My First Marble Hybrid Trout.



Brown Trout.



Lucky to get this Mayfly photo.

Day two took us to Stefano di Cadore, Approx. 50Km, again about a 1hr drive, where we fished the Padola, a tributary of the Piave.



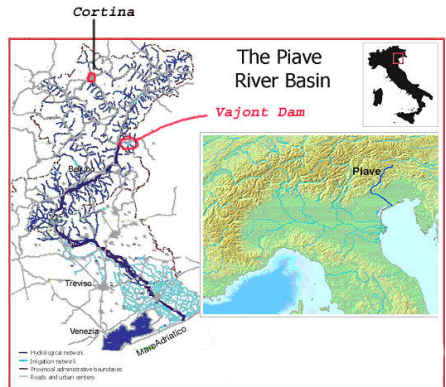
Angelo holding another nice Grayling.



My best Rainbow.

This area produced some good Grayling and Rainbows, with dry fly action increasing later in the evening. A pure Marble Trout capture would have to be for another trip to Italy, or a possibility in Slovenia in a week's time.

The Piave valley has had a dramatic history, some of which we uncovered whilst there.



15km below where we were fishing is located the Vajont Dam and the village of Longarone.

The Vajont Dam, 262 m (858 ft.) high, on the Vajont River, a tributary of the Piave River, one of the highest in the world, was completed in 1961 to generate electricity.

It was to be part of the artificial system of the Piave and was intended to be at the centre of a complex system of water management in which water would have been channeled from nearby valleys and artificial basins located at higher levels.

On 4 November 1960, with the level of the basin, at about 190 metres of the planned 262, a landslide of about 800,000 cubic metres collapsed into the lake.

The company Società Adriatica di Elettricità, SADE (English: Adriatic Energy Corporation) stopped the filling, lowered the level by about 50 metres and started to build an artificial gallery.

This gallery was in the basin in front of Monte Toc, to keep the basin usable even when the expected further landslides divided it into two parts.

In October 1961, after the completion of the gallery, SADE restarted the filling under controlled monitoring.

In April and May 1962, with the basin at 215 metres, the people of Erto e Casso reported five earthquakes of 'grade five' on the Mercalli scale, although SADE downplayed their importance. SADE was then authorised to complete the filling up to the maximum level.

In July 1962, SADE's own engineers reported the results of model-based experiments on the effects of further landslides into the lake, which predicted a devastating disaster if they happened when the basin was full.

In March 1963, the dam was transferred to the newly constituted public company for electricity, ENEL, but the management remained the same.

In the following summer, with the basin almost completely filled, slides, shakes and movements of the ground were continuously reported by the scared population.

On 15 September the entire side of the mountain moved down by 22 centimetres.

On 26 September, SADE decided to slowly empty the basin down to the level of 240 metres, but in early October the collapse of the mountain

looked unavoidable - one day it moved almost one metre.

On 9 October 1963 at approximately 10:35pm, the combination of 'drawing-down the reservoir' and heavy rains triggered a landslide of about 260 million cubic metres of forest, earth, and rock, which fell into the reservoir at up to 110 km per hour. The resulting displacement of water caused 50 million cubic metres of water to over-top the dam in a 250-metre high wave.



The Vajont Dam as seen from Longarone today.

The 250 metre wall of water that over-topped the dam would have obscured virtually all of the sky in this picture.

Despite this, the dam's structure was largely undamaged.

The top metre of masonry was washed away, but the basic structure remained intact.

The flooding in the Piave valley destroyed 9 villages and estimates of the death toll range from 1900 to 2500 people.

About 350 families were completely wiped out.



The Longarone Bell Tower that remained standing after the 'wave of death'.

The Church at the base of the Bell Tower at Longarone was completely swept away along with the entire village.



A pumping station was later installed in the dam basin to keep the lake at a constant level, and the bypass gallery was lengthened beyond the dam to let the water flow down to the Piave valley.

The dam wall is still in place and maintained, but there are no plans to exploit it.

The dry basin, filled with landslip, has been open to visitors since 2002.

It was an eerie experience to drive past the village of Longarone. It no longer has traditional architecture as all the buildings have been replaced.

As a finale to our stay in Cortina Alessandro had booked the, 2 Michelin Stared, Ristotante Laite at SAPPADA.

This authentic, heritage listed, village is 10km upstream from our Sunday fishing spot so the girls met us on the river and with a quick change we enjoyed a wonderful gustation meal, with all local produce, fine wines and great service.

Our time in Cortina d'Ampezzo had come to an end.

Brian Quinn