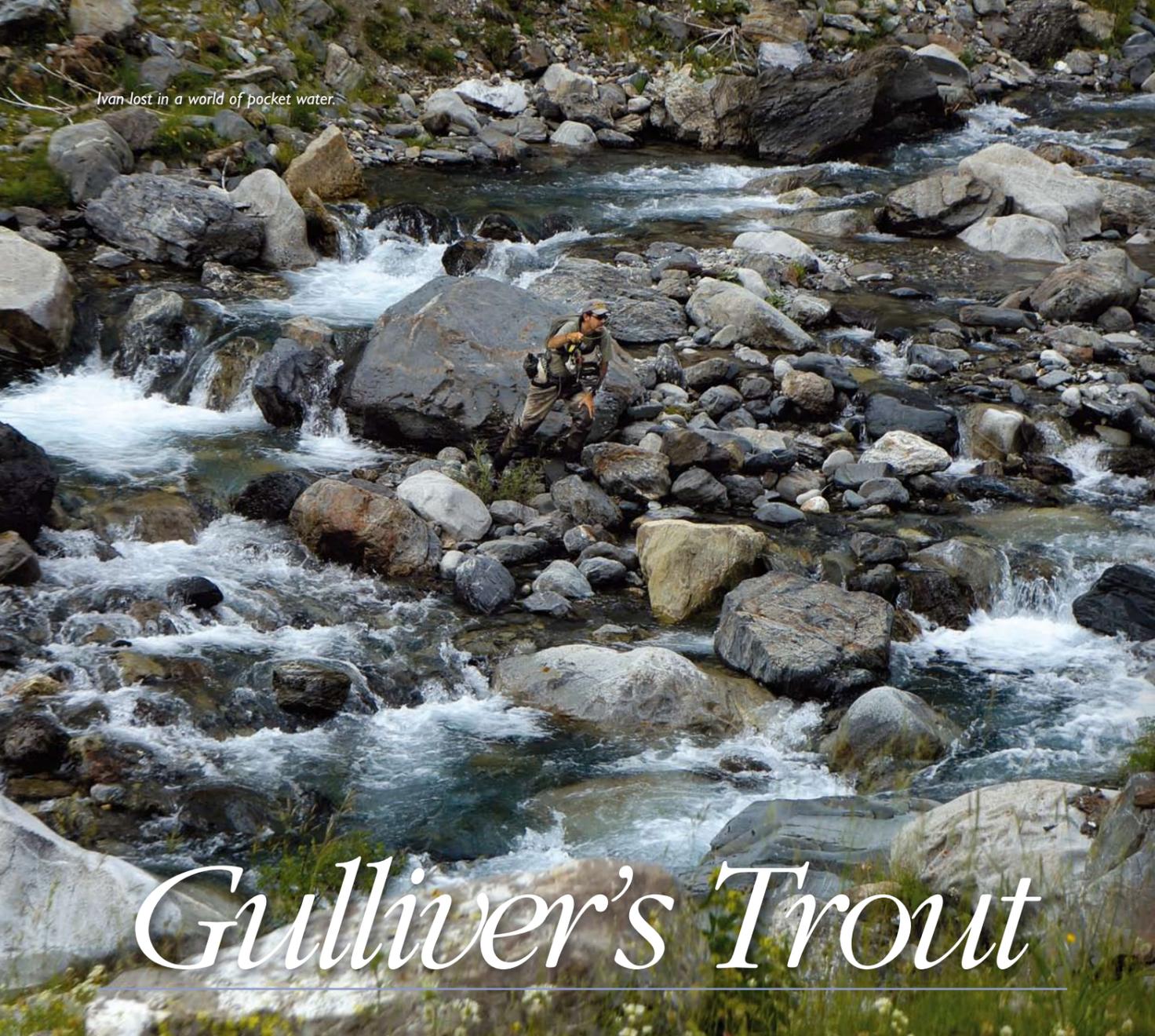


Ivan lost in a world of pocket water.



# Gulliver's Trout

## Rob Sloane joins the light-tackle worshippers.

When the first fish sailed back over my head, I admit I was having doubts. We were high in the mountains on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees (see Postcard, page 82). The scenery was to die for, the stream was as bright and clear as a bottle of Perrier, but the brook trout I'd just hooked had failed to bend my 5-weight.

Ramon, my guide for the day, assured me as best he could that it was indeed a small one. The small ones we were after, apparently, were not quite that small. There were bigger small ones, maybe 9 to 12 inches. Big enough to cradle in your hand with a bit of flop on either side.

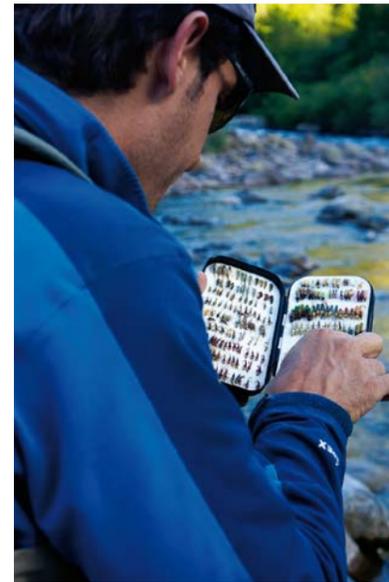
Within minutes I was in the zone, totally absorbed, entirely focused. The fishing was highly active and dynamic: crouching low, sneaking forward, holding the rod high with arm extended, drifting the fly through pockets of likely water, doing everything possible to avoid drag. It was non-stop fishing with no shortage of responses.

Many of the trout seen and caught were indeed bigger, though it really didn't matter. The challenge was to dissect the water thoroughly, efficiently, without missing anything that might harbour a speckled surprise.

I had transcended to some higher plane of fishing. Like so many pilgrims on those mountain trails, I was on a

path to enlightenment. My thoughts, my focus, everything had to be scaled down to size. I was Gulliver in a kingdom of miniatures, though the towering mountain backdrop was real enough. Submerged rocks the size of bricks might harbour a fish and mere hesitations in the flow and flat spots the size of dinner plates, even saucers, were likely places. All I had to do was pick the hot spots and devise ways to stroke, drift or stall the fly there for a mere second or two.

Ramon was happy just to follow, to watch, and to let me do my own thing, although he probably didn't appreciate that this wasn't my thing at all. After an hour I realised I'd barely covered



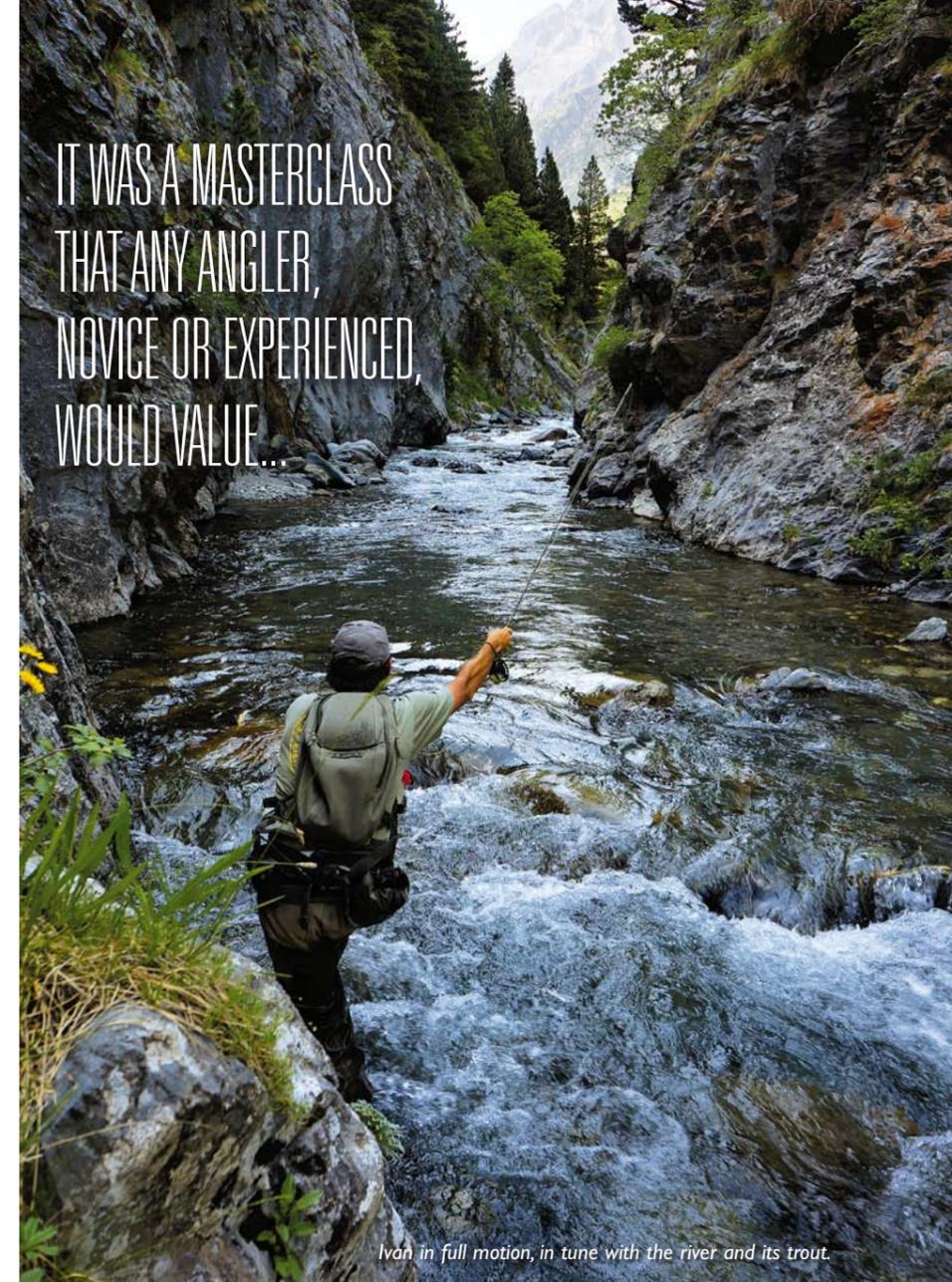
Time for a fly change.

a hundred metres of the pocket sized stream, in a valley that stretched forever into the distant mountains.

"Am I too slow," I asked in failed Spanish. He shook his head, waved at me to continue, and repeated advice that he'd given before. "The rock," he said, "Roca," pointing to a spot I had failed to cover. As before, it yielded a brook trout, right on cue.

My arm and shoulder were quite sore at the end of the day, not from fighting fish or double hauling but from holding the rod up and reaching right out, to flick and guide and work the fly through every nook and cranny. I'd made more casts and presentations in four or five hours than I would normally make in an entire season!

IT WAS A MASTERCLASS THAT ANY ANGLER, NOVICE OR EXPERIENCED, WOULD VALUE...



Ivan in full motion, in tune with the river and its trout.



That first brook trout could have survived in the pool of water cupped in my hand.

### MASTERCLASS

On subsequent days my guide was Ivan Tarin, my rod a 3-weight borrowed from Sage-man Peter Morse. The mountain rivers we fished were sometimes larger and so too were some of the resident browns, but there was little wind and the 3-weight made more sense.

The rod was balanced with a simple reel and matching line, with a smooth leader connection that slipped easily through the rod tip when fishing really short, allowing a long leader to be worked at times within the rod tip. The rod did whatever I asked of it, from the very first cast.

Ivan constantly tested my skills. One afternoon, deep in a hidden valley, we shared the rod (thanks Peter) on a stretch where turbulent gutters flowed between islands of rock. Short-drifting



This immature brown snaffled a small Stimulator.

## Gulliver's Trout

... continued

a foam grasshopper pattern we tried hard to out-do each other, to catch the beautifully marked native browns from the most ridiculously difficult and unlikely patches of water.

Watching Ivan fish, and listening to his gentle prompts and reminders when it was my turn, taught me so much about pocket water fishing. It was a masterclass that any angler, novice or experienced, would value in a lifetime of fishing days.

Ivan encouraged me to fish much closer than I would have dared, and more side-on than upstream in really fast currents. "No, they won't see you in the broken water," he insisted.

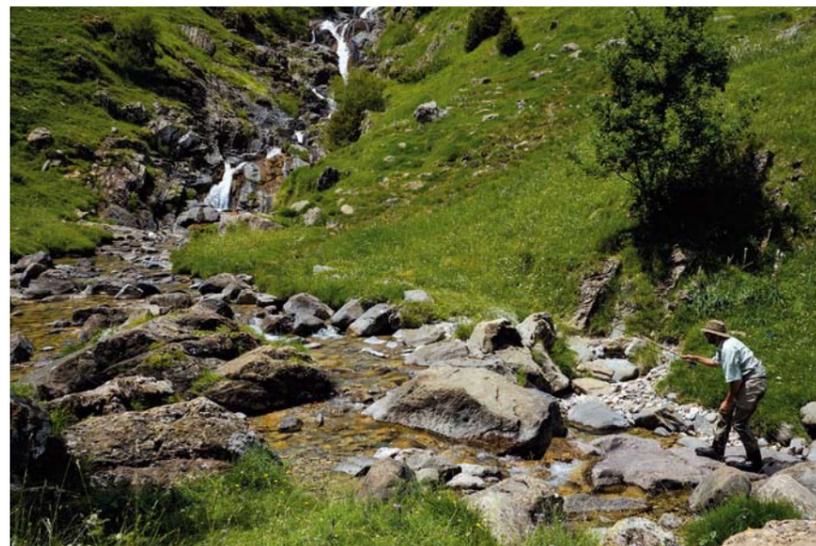
'Move closer', 'short line', and 'high sticking' were three mantras he often repeated. Drifts were short, fast and repetitive, each time covering a different micro-habitat with arm and rod forever reaching out and held aloft, and minimal line in contact with the water. Not only did this rod-tip fishing style improve line control and counter-act drag, it resulted in a better hook-up rate on these lightning fast risers. The fishing was exhilarating, each take celebrated with a shout and a cheer.

Ivan constantly experimented with fly and leader changes and had me fishing with some of the lightest tip-

pets and smallest flies I've ever used. Dry flies were invariably first choice, but if good drifts through likely runs drew a blank he would often call for a small nymph or Gammarus (amphipod) drifted under a Klinkhamer style dry. Brightly coloured wing posts (yellow, or pink) helped keep track of the indicator fly drifting in the bubble line, and he was ever willing to shake dries in a container of desiccant, to keep them riding high and visible.

The lighter tippets weren't a sporting gesture: they gave the fly much more freedom, to dance and twist and twirl in rhythm with the flow.

Ivan insisted I strike at any and every possible hesitation of the indi-



Enough water to hide lots of trout.

cator when fishing nymphs, proving time and time again that many of my suggestions that the fly had touched the bottom were actual bites from fish. A favourite prompting call was a simple "Attentiffe!" as the fly neared anything he recognised as a sweet spot. So often his predictions were right.

But most of the time I was lost in my own miniature world, for hour after hour. The only reminder that anyone else was still breathing on the planet was an occasional whiff of cigarette smoke, or a tap on the shoulder and a gentle acknowledgement: "I like your drifts."

### TRANSLATION

I might be a bit late getting on to this style of fishing but it kept me entertained for the best part of a week. I've caught a lot of fish, fresh and salt, in a lot of places, but rarely have I had this much fun.

All this took place in the Pyrenees, but that's not the point. It was a wonderful place—granted—but the lessons learned can be translated to so many waters much closer to home. Mine was a crash course, with a highly skilled expert, but the essentials are simple enough.

Shrink the water, shrink the rod, shrink the fly and the leader too. Move closer, fish shorter, and use every inch of your reach and rod length to advantage. Kneel, sit, squat and crawl through the rocks, using anything and everything as cover. Tease, hang, stroke, dance and dabble that fly so it drifts and stalls for long enough over every conceivable lie.

If this inspires you to give it a go, I've done my job. My Pyrenees epiphany has certainly inspired me. **FI**



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