

**FlyFisher** (monthly magazine in Japanese, published on 22<sup>nd</sup> of every month)

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English translation of pages 078 to 081 below.

Pages 078, 079, 080, and 081

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## **Meeting Trout of Eastern Europe**

### **RED YARN FLY OF THE UNKNOWN COUNTRY MACEDONIA**

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Republic of Macedonia.

Name of this place may not sound familiar, but it is where Alexander the Great and Mother Teresa were.

It is here that an ancient record of fly fishing using red yarn remains.

What will happen if the ancient fly was cast now....?

Pondering on the rich history, I have journeyed the river of the unknown country.

Photo caption from top to bottom on page 078

- Radika River that runs through the Mavrovo forests
- Mother Teresa Memorial. She was born in Skopje, and stayed until the age of 18.
- Macedonia Square, located in central part of the capital Skopje, at dusk

## **Chance to fish in Macedonia**

In late January 2014, an orientation was to be held at Japan Photographers Society (JPS) on "Macedonia Program". I am always fascinated by visiting uncommon places, and the magical sound of "Macedonia" rang in my ears, leading me to take part in the orientation. In this program, Macedonian government agency selects and invites photographers who have specific themes they wish to cover, and who have negotiated with Japanese media to introduce how attractive Macedonia is.

The official name for Macedonia is Republic of Macedonia, which in Japan is called Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). FYROM declared independence from Former Yugoslavia in September 1991. Its capital is Skopje, and its area is about two-thirds the size of Kyushu, with population of 2.07 million (as of 2013 data).

According to the reference materials provided at the Program, Macedonia had cultural heritage with rich history and abundant nature. It was also the birth place of Mother Teresa, and it produced one of the best wines in the world.

Image of Macedonia overlapped with 4 years of my life in my 20s spent in Tokachi area of Hokkaido. I had frequently fished in mountain streams then. Of course it would be wonderful to introduce historical heritage and tasty wine of Macedonia, but the experience of fishing in midst marvels of nature might be another appealing point. Based on this thought, I applied for the program, which was selected in early April, and so I headed for the unknown country Macedonia one month later.

### **What is Mavrovo like?**

May 4<sup>th</sup>. I had planned to leave Narita Airport, change planes in Istanbul, Turkey, and arrive at Macedonia Skopje Airport that day... but there was someone I knew in Turkey from a photo session 20 years ago, a Japanese who had been to Macedonia, and I was lucky enough to stay overnight in Istanbul to meet her and ask for advice and information. At 7:50pm the next day, I arrived safely at Skopje Airport. The time difference is minus 7 hours from Japan time.

At the exit of the airport, there was a man with a board with my name written on it. That was the driver of this Program, Jordan.

Since the time was very limited, we got in the car, and headed for Mavrovo, our destination, famous for Radika River. On the way, Jordan taught me about places we passed through, including mosques with illuminations. There was approximately two hours of learning about Macedonia, before we reached the destination.

It was quite chilly getting out of the car, with light rain. The hotel owner told us the temperature that day was about 10 degrees Centigrade. During late supper, Jordan told me he was definitely sure it will be sunny the next day. I counted on that, and went to bed.

Next morning, I was surprised to look out the window. There stood mountains covered with fresh greenery, and there was no rain. It really might become sunny in the afternoon. I took a walk around the hotel before breakfast, and the area reminded me of Karuizawa resort villa area in Japan. In the neighborhood is an artificial Mavrovo Lake, 2.4km in circumference, with ski slopes. The altitude is 1300-1700m.

After breakfast, I headed for the designated place, the Mountain Guide Information Center. Two staff members were there, and they told me a mountain guide and a fly fisher was expected any moment.

Then came the mountain guide. He had an air of a true professional of the mountains, at first glance. He introduced himself as Dusko. In his backpack, he had lots of Mavrovo guide books, most of which he himself produced. It was written in both Macedonian and English. He was considering creating a

Japanese version in the future.

Next came the fly fisher Vase, running in to the Center. He started talking with the Center staff in Macedonian, and the information staff told me in English what was going on. There was a sudden need for him to go to Germany, and he could not accompany us to go fly fishing.

To be honest, I was at a loss then, since I had been told that a local fly fisher will go with us and that I had nothing to worry about.

That was how my first day began, with sort of a smack in the eye, but went location hunting near Mavrovo areas with Dusko the mountain guide and Jordan the driver. During the ride, I could not fully appreciate the beautiful scenery, since I was concerned with what will and will not happen without the fly fisher accompanying us.

However, when we reached Galichnik, a village in the mountains which seemed like a village floating in the skies, I was overtaken by its magnificence. Every July, a festival for the brides is held at a small church in the village, and I heard tourists visit to appreciate the brides dressed in traditional formal wear.

One villager, upon hearing that I was from Japan, invited me into his house, introducing me to a strong distilled liquor with 50% alcohol called Rakija, made from grapes. There was a burning sensation in my throat, and then the unique liquid found its way penetrating into every cell of my body. Perhaps this drink, on top of beautiful scenery and kind people, uplifted my spirits. "After all, tomorrow is another day!" All the way below in the distance, I caught a glimpse of Radika River. Tomorrow, we will go fishing!

Photo captions from top to bottom, left to right on page 079

- Skopje citizens enjoying fishing at Vardar River, and a cat trying to get its share
- Traditional fly in Macedonia. It is said to work well at Radika River
- Fly imitating syrphid. Specially made by Novica, the fly fisher.
- Horse fly frequently seen in Macedonia. The fly was also created by Novica.

### **Using ancient fly for trout**

On the second day, I woke up very early, at 4:30am. As a result of the location hunting and information gathering the day before, we decided to go fishing for trout that day at River Radika near Janche Village..

I cannot but feel that it was sort of my destiny to go fly fishing in Macedonia. I only have a year and half of fly-fishing experience, but some time ago I suddenly felt the need to study the roots of this type of fishing, and looked for related information on the internet. According to one reference on history of

fly-fishing, I found that a Roman poet had left in writing around 300BC about Macedonian people fishing trout by using flies made from red yarn.

Until then I had never doubted that the origin of fly fishing was the United Kingdom, but of course, the idea to fish using flies could have originated much earlier, in various places.

As days passed, I had begun to wish to fish with the traditional red-yarn fly in the country of Macedonia. And the dream was about to come true.

Upon leaving the hotel, guides insisted on taking me to a monastery, St. Jovan Bigorski, which stood by the river. I felt there was Macedonian spirit in the serene environment, and bowed in front of Maria statue to wish for a good day. Then we headed for River Radika.

We arrived at the fishing point around 10am. The flow of river looked good. I used the simple fly with red yarn and casted into the point.

The temperature rose to around 16 degrees Centigrade, but no strikes at all. A farmer passed by, so I asked Dusko the mountain guide to obtain some information from him. The farmer said it is better in the upper stream. We moved upper stream, and tried, to no avail.

According to the farmer, the water level was lower than usual this year. The river itself reminded me of mountain streams near Nukabira-ko Lake in Hokkaido, and we were careful to cast fly rods minding the tree branches around .

“It is near lunch time, and fish are resting.” Dusko seemed to tell me using his gestures. So, we went to Janche Village for lunch.

Photo captions from 1 to 9 on page 080

1. I created a simple fly, trying to imagine how Macedonians in 300BC fished tying red yarn onto a hook.
2. Mavrovo Lake 2.4km around
3. Driver Jordan (left) and mountain guides of Mavrovo National Park
4. Fly fisher Novica who accompanied us (left), and mountain guide Dusko (right). I am in center.
5. Fishing shop in Skopje. Half of the shop were for hunters, with many rifles
6. Rakija, distilled liquor made from grapes, alcohol content 50%
7. Galichnik Village sits in magnificent setting
8. Brook with river bank the shape of a cross, to pour holy water. Radika River is abundant with springs for travelers to quench thirst.

9. Novica (left) and son of mountain guide Dusko arriving at Radika River and preparing to fish

### **Lunch brings big news**

When we were having lunch at a restaurant of a fancy hotel located on the slope of a hill, the owner came to greet us. He was a friend of Dusko. I showed him the English documents I prepared in Japan for this visit, about how the ancient Macedonian fished tying a red yarn around a hook. He reacted to my comment, brought over some materials himself, and told me that although he does not know much about the ancient times, he does know that at the Radika River, a fly resembling a horsefly as shown in his materials was most popular. Although there are no fishing shops around the area, there is some in Skopje. I regretted coming straight from Skopje to Mavrovo, not taking time to gather information in Skopje.

On looking out the hotel window and watching River Radika, the owner said, “You might be able to fish in that area of the River, give it a try.” However, as time passed, in the evening, the temperature suddenly dropped. I needed to wear a light sweater.

There was enough breadth in the River to freely cast fly rod. Among the flies I had brought from Japan, I chose one that seemed close to the one the hotel owner showed me, tied it, and tried casting. No strikes. Maybe the water temperature was too low.

I turned the rocks on the bottom of the river, and found there was some aquatic insect larva, meaning there is enough food underwater. Then, there came young villagers by car. It seemed they were going to camp at night. It was Thursday, so I wondered why, and asked about it. They told me friends have gathered and so they came to enjoy barbecue by the river. I remembered having done a lot of mutton barbecue by the river when I was in Hokkaido. I guess all youngsters enjoy similar things.

I had only another day of stay left in Mavrovo. The mountain guide Dusko tells me it is going to be a “Nice day.” His smile was convincing, and so I counted on that and hurried back to the hotel.

### **Looking for miracles**

I woke up early again, on the final day in Mavrovo, at 5am. It seemed cloudy outside, but the TV forecast had a rain mark for that afternoon. The temperature will rise only to 12 degrees Centigrade. It might rain, so I double-checked the rain gear for my camera, to be ready for anything.

Driver Jordan came to join us for the morning briefing that started around 7:30am, which continues during breakfast that begins at 8am. He was staying at another hotel, where the owner was his friend,

so we always parted after dinner, and met before next breakfast.

Today, Dusko was with him, which was unusual. We always met at a restaurant before then. According to Jordan, a fly fisher was found, who is willing to go with us. So, this was what “Nice day.” was all about!

When we went to the meeting point by the lake, 2 fishers were waiting for us. We hurried loading our camera and fishing equipment onto their car, Dusko and I got in that car, and headed for Radika River. Jordan stayed and waited for us in the village.

During the ride, I found that the elder of the fisher was a policeman of Mavrovo, named Novica. This day was his day off, so he had plenty of time to share with us. The younger was the son of Dusko the mountain guide. Yes, they do look alike.

They told me there was a point where 50cm Radika Trout can be caught and we decided to go there first. On arriving, Novica said “Here, reddish dry fly works very well.” He casted his fly. He was a jolly person in the car, but now, he had the air of a hunter.

He tried several points, but the fish would not respond. I kept on holding my camera and looking through the finder glass, and waited for one rare instant, which might never happen again. I did see fish shadows, and they were large.

Unfortunately, there was no strike that day, and the fish never touched the fly. Novica wanted to show me the fish, so he changed to lure and tried fishing again. Still no strikes. Novica told me that since the water temperature was low, the fish were not willing to move much. He also told me that it is popular for people there to change from fly fishing to lure fishing if there were no hits.

It might have been a bit early for the season, and I saw no other fly fishers around, but there were many animal footprints. Lynx is said to live in the region. Bears lived deeper in the forests and there was no need to worry about. When Novica and I were absorbed in our fishing tries, Dusko was checking around using his binoculars. You never know what will happen in the mountains, and so he was quietly and professionally supporting us, I felt.

Dusko beckoned me to come closer. I did, and he said, in his newly-learned Japanese, “Oishii, oisshii,” which meant delicious. There was a spring. I drank from the spring with a cup handed over to me, and felt that a sense of tension melted away. There was a Macedonian coin by the side of the spring, and I think it was their way of thanking and protecting Mother Nature.

Suddenly, there was a sound of rain in the forests, and then came a downpour. Fish were not caught, but we were caught in a shower. Dusko shook his face, held out his hands to the sky, a gesture he had done before. Novica came back from the river. Camera equipment had enough rain gear, but it seems the photo session was over. Just a glimpse of trout was all I wished for, but that did not happen this time. I guess it is this sort of experience that makes you look forward to the next opportunity.

Dusko rubbed his stomach, gesturing hunger, and we headed for the restaurant and had late lunch together, talking about fishing at the Radika River. Macedonia welcomes travelers with full hospitality and warm hearts. I will have to improve my fishing skills before going back to try again.

Photo captions from top to bottom on page 081

- I tried fly fishing using the fly with red yarn
- Novica casting at a point in Radika River. His eyes were like that of a hunter.
- Only a farm-raised trout was caught during my visit, but this picture was sent to me later. It is Vase, the local fly fisher, showing rainbow trout he had caught at Radika River
- In Macedonia, in addition to fishing there are abundant artworks, cultural heritage, and food to appreciate. This is the interior of a church. The building looks relatively new, but there is the quietness and serene air.

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## Information Guide

### **Fishing in Macedonia**

-Notes: Fishing season at Radika River is from April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>.

The period is similar to that in Japan, but fishing is allowed only 3 days a week, on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. As for Mavrovo Lake, the fishing season is the same, but it is possible to fish all days of the week. As for details, please refer to information listed below.

- Embassy of Republic of Macedonia in Japan (address below revised Oct 29, 2014)  
Higashi Gotanda 5-16-17, Shinagawa-ku, 141-0022, Tokyo, Japan  
Phone: +81(0)3 6868 7110 Fax: +81(0)3 6447 7930  
Email: Tokyo@mfa.gov.mk
- Macedonia Tourist Agency website: [www.macedonia-timeless.com](http://www.macedonia-timeless.com) (English)
- Macedonia Fishing Info website: [www.Ribar.com.mk](http://www.Ribar.com.mk) (Macedonian)

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The End