



Rocking and Rollin' on the Rosanna Gorge

Expedition paddler and coach Steve Brooks heads in to the upper reaches of an Austrian Alpine classic to take on the raging waters of the Rosanna River's Gorge...

Alpine Whitewater Adventure

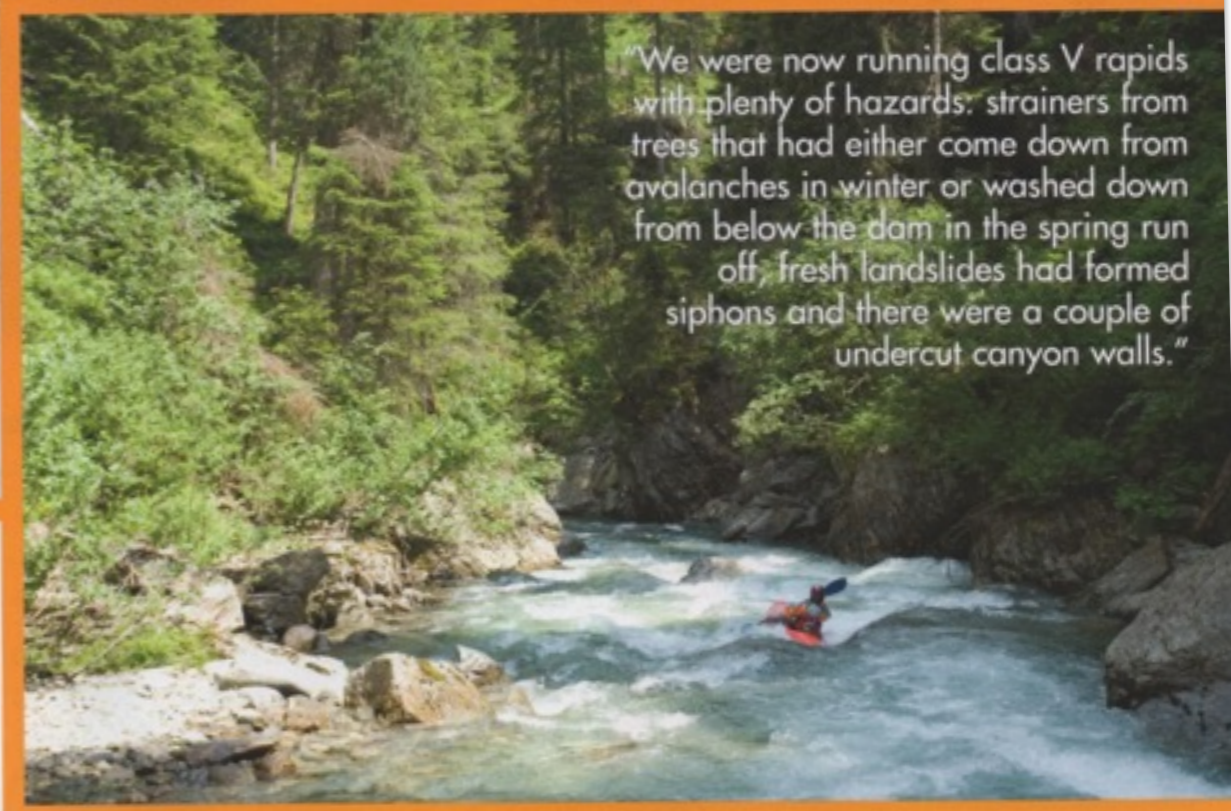
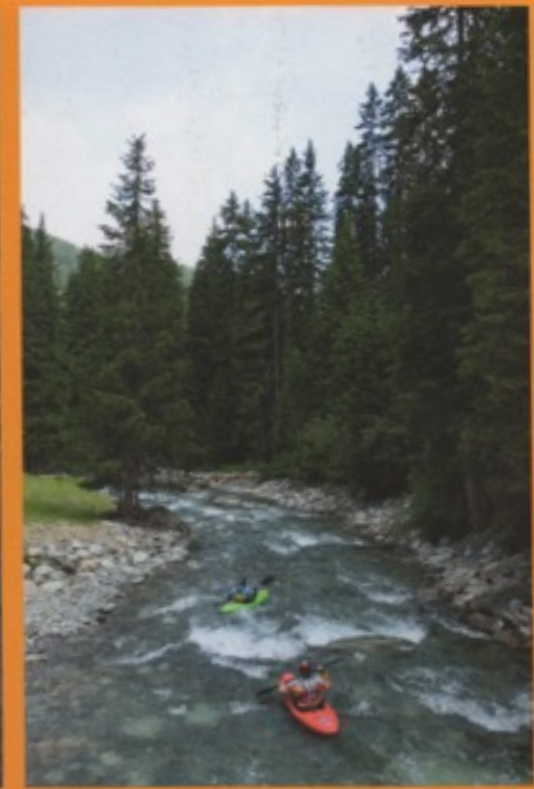
Article and images by Steve Brooks

It had been an early morning start; we had driven into the Verwall Valley at 8am to stash the kayaks at the put-in and then headed back home for breakfast. It was not long before John and Andy arrived and the kettle was back on! The team consisted of four. John Blake who now calls Sonthofen, in Germany, home. I have shared many thrills, spills and adventures around the globe with John. An irrepressible kayaker who will boat with absolutely anyone

and seems to know absolutely everyone! Andy MacDonald lives in the Oetz Valley and is a natural born kayaker. He has represented Britain at freestyle (he always says he is a playboater at heart) though you can find him regularly running his two local sections: the Middle Oetz and the Upper Pitzbach. Our final team member is Ute - my wife! A local girl, Ute has found a sport in kayaking where she can travel into some of the remotest places in the world and certainly have a

lot of fun. She must certainly love the sport as she has had her fair share of nasty swims and bruises to go with it! Ute is also a qualified Schiffführer and has got a rucksack full of climbing kit just in case an extraction was needed!

The plan had been in the making for the past five years, actually since we had built our house in the Arlberg. I had been checking the river levels throughout the spring and early summer, looking at what effect the relevant winters had on the river and



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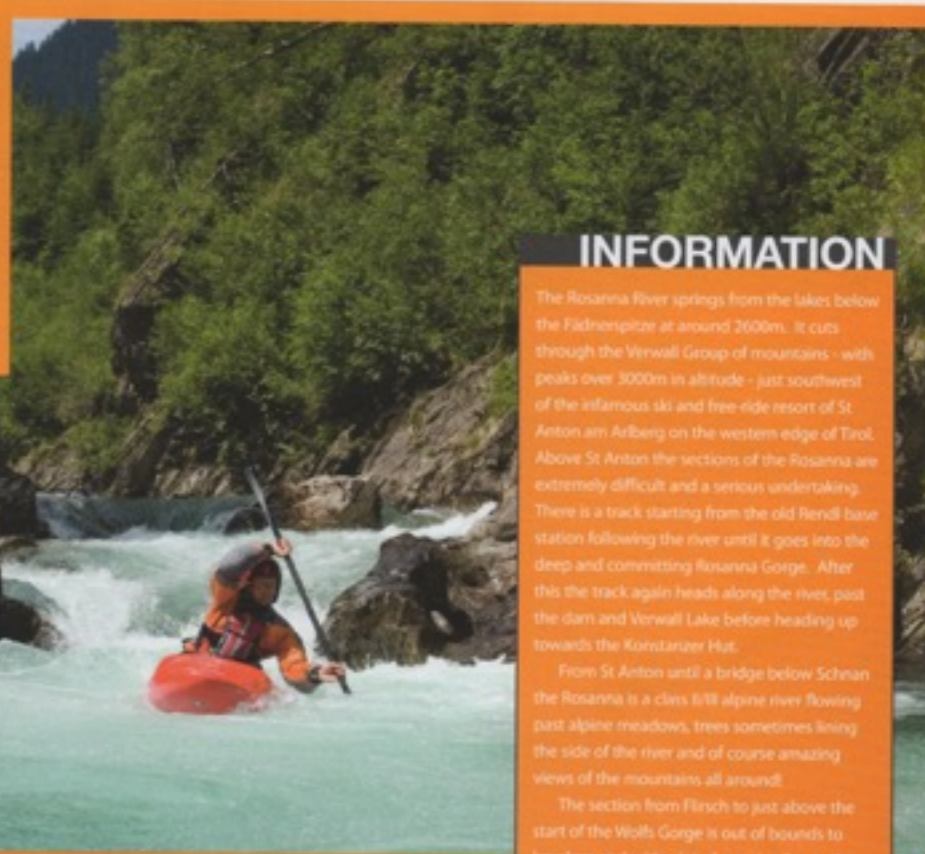
INFORMATION

Put-in: Bridge close to Rasthaus Verwall
Take-out: Old Rendl base station
Season: Mid-June until end of July. Depending on previous winter season and how much snow fell in St Anton and the surrounding area
Length: 4km in total. Gorge section: 2km
Gradient: Put-in to start of gorge: 20m/km gorge section: 45m/km and up to 60m/km in the steepest part! Gorge exit to take-out: 30m/km
Gauge: bridge just upstream of Take-out. We ran the gorge at 55cm and this is ideal!
Grades: The gorge is class V/VI
Scouting: Scouting is difficult. There is a path from the take-out that follows the river until the gorge, from there the path winds its way up and you only get a few glimpses which give you a general idea of what the river is up to down there.
Hazards: Undercuts, siphons, strainers and sharp rocks. Avalanche debris can cause problems and too early could mean snow still in the gorge as not much sunlight gets in there in spring. Water level is critical and so too is the weather. Some parts of the gorge the walls are unstable and any storms or hailstones could cause rocks to fall down and even the wall to slide!
Traffic Restrictions: From 9am to 5pm there is no private vehicle access into the Verwall Valley. There is a bus service costing in 2010 €2.30 per person one-way and €4.60 for a day ticket. For timings and more info check out www.stantonamariberg.com. We drove in early, left our boats at the put-in then drove back to St Anton and caught the bus in with the rest of our kit.



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gorge and just how easy it would be to exit the gorge if there was an emergency situation! Though there is a track that follows the river from the Rendl Base Station, once you reach the gorge you only really get small glimpses of what the river is doing. There is a lot of gradient lost in the gorge and the questions that kept cropping up where: ‘Is it all runnable?’ ‘Can we scout everything?’ ‘Can we portage and where does all that gradient go?’ The only information I could find about the river itself was that it had apparently been kayaked but by who and when?
 So after a few more cups of tea we headed into St Anton and caught the bus into Verwall. The sun was out and the weather was looking promising. There was the chance of late afternoon showers and possible thunderstorms but we were expecting to be out of the gorge and off the river by the time it was due over the Arlberg.



INFORMATION

The Rosanna River springs from the lakes below the Faldnerpitze at around 2600m. It cuts through the Verwall Group of mountains - with peaks over 3000m in altitude - just southwest of the infamous ski and free-ride resort of St Anton am Arlberg on the western edge of Tirol. Above St Anton the sections of the Rosanna are extremely difficult and a serious undertaking. There is a track starting from the old Rendl base station following the river until it goes into the deep and committing Rosanna Gorge. After this the track again heads along the river, past the dam and Verwall Lake before heading up towards the Korstanzer Hut.

From St Anton until a bridge below Schan the Rosanna is a class IV/II alpine river flowing past alpine meadows, trees sometimes lining the side of the river and of course amazing views of the mountains all around!

The section from Flirsch to just above the start of the Wolfs Gorge is out of bounds to kayakers and with a lot of metal spikes in the middle of the river as the river steepens leaving Flirsch it is certainly not recommended either! These spikes are only noticeable in winter or with low water levels!

The Wolfs Gorge has changed dramatically since the devastating floods in 2005. It has been turned into a canal but is gradually seeing more rocks coming down in high water finally forming waves and a few holes but nothing like how it used to be. In 2010 there was a landslide coming in from Strengen on river left, but with the diggers in there a day later it has been cleaned right out!

From the take-out of the Wolfs Gorge until the meeting of the Trisanna (from here on it is the Sarva) it is strictly forbidden to kayak. Again in 2005 there was a huge landslide (the road got taken down including the railway) and the whole mountainside is being monitored just in case it happens to slide again! If that does not put you off then the big fine should if you get caught!

Web

For more great whitewater features, gear and boat tests, how to videos and river guides eddy out at www.canoe-kayak.co.uk

AUTHOR

Steve Brooks

Steve lives, sleeps and eats kayaking. From breaking the ice on the side of the river, in an eddy, in winter in Great Britain at the beginning of his career to running some of the deepest gorges, dense jungle torrents, huge volume and high altitude rivers on the planet. In fact Steve has paddled in over 16 countries, on five continents and it is this sense of adventure and facing the unknown that drives his passion for kayaking. More recently Steve has set up a kayak school in his home area of the Arlberg, west Austria. For more info check out: www.gokayaking.at and www.stevebrooks.at



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Siphons, Slides and Tree Dodging

The first part was pretty flat, not much water in the river but we were not scraping the hull of our boats.

After a kilometre the river walls were starting to close in and we came to our first major rapid, the first part was a one metre drop into a pool then a move to river left to take the tongue where the river went just under a huge broached alpine tree. A little further downstream was another drop this time in three parts, with clean lines in each. The gorge then started to deepen and tighten up. We were now running class V rapids with plenty of hazards: strainers from trees that had either come down from avalanches in winter or washed down from below the dam in the spring run off, fresh landslides had formed siphons and there were a couple of undercut canyon walls.

Halfway into the canyon the river really began to steepen up and the drops were coming right at us, fast and furious. We were managing to scout everything, though safety was sometimes a concern for whoever went first as we could not always walk around to the bottom of the rapid due the steep canyon walls. We had radio contact with Ute and could send a progress report with our rough

location. A couple of rapids were viewable from the track high above us and we were proving to be quite an attraction way down below!

The End is Nigh!

The end of the gorge was now in sight, with just a few more rapids to run including a nasty drop with an overhanging rock where most of the river was heading. The weather had turned on us by now, and the rain was coming down heavily and the light had certainly decreased giving the final part of the gorge even more of a darker intense feel!

A last we exited the gorge and now had a one-kilometre paddle to the take-out. With the hardest part behind us we knew from now on the track followed close to the river and it was all read and run fun. By the time we passed the Moosbach on river right, and kayaked under the Arlberg tunnel (that's right the tunnel actually goes over the Rosanna) it felt like we were literally flying as we sped down the final part of the Rosanna, our kayaks dancing on the whitewater as we went...

We had made it, what a day! It had taken us over four-hours to run just four kilometres of the Rosanna, but we had opened a sleeping giant! It was time to head into St Anton for a coffee and a well-deserved Apfelstrudel. ☺