

Spanish treasures

PHIL PEMBROKE selects his top 10 fly-fishing destinations in Spain

Variety and value for money are the key words when considering an angling holiday in Spain. A budget flight combined with a local angling licence for as little as €7.6 (£5) will gain you access to some of the best trout and salmon waters in Europe.

All Spanish rivers are in public ownership and their management has been the responsibility of regional government since 1984. The regional government environmental department is called the Medio Ambiente and it provides angling licences and day tickets for the restricted fishing beats (*cotos de pesca*). These can be obtained from the main towns.

There is often a ballot at the beginning of season to allocate cotos: but leftover day tickets are also available in large quantities from local angling clubs, bars and petrol stations.

The angling season in Spain varies between regions but in general stretches from March through September.

Spanish rivers display a strong

genetic diversity in native brown trout. River valleys one kilometre apart may possess their own sub species with different colour patterns. This uniquely diverse native gene pool is under threat from restocking (to combat over fishing) with too similar strains.

One exception is in Galicia. Restocking here is carried out with greater subtlety, eg breeding hybrid strains by introducing genetically distinct German brown trout.

Pesca sin muerte – catch and release – is the way to go. Where implemented, local anglers have experienced an astonishing recovery in local fish stocks.

Older Spanish anglers still prefer to fish for the table. But by choosing to fish a water classified as *pesca sin muerte* you may have a whole top class water in a stunning location all to yourself for the day or even a week!

Selecting my favourite top ten angling venues has been a struggle considering there are thousands of superb locations to choose from, but here goes.

Above left:
The Río
Tormes at
Salamanca.

Above: A fish
pass on the
Río Sella near
the Hotel
Salmonera,
Cano.

Above right:
The Roman
bridge
Cangas de
Onís.

1. Río Cares At Panes Asturias

(Salmon, trout and sea trout). This is the most breathtaking of the free fishing areas found in the Asturias. The views of the river as you approach from above are spectacular, looking more like Canada than Spain, but even this does not prepare you for the power and clarity of this wild stretch of river with white boulder-strewn banks.

Many free areas are not suitable for the traditional *aut toc* bait method practised by local salmon fishermen and so are often empty. They offer superb fly-fishing sport.

(More salmon are caught in the Asturias than the rest of Iberia put together. It is common knowledge that the most famous cotos are always oversubscribed. Don't forget, then, that there are ten times as many high-quality free fishing zones to choose from. The record salmon is 35lb caught in 1962.)

Directions: Take a small side road at Panes from the town-bridge on the left hand bank looking downstream and drive for about 5 km upstream then turn onto a rough farm track for a kilometre and down to the river.

2. Coto Tempranas, Río Sella at Cangas de Onís Asturias

(Salmon, trout and sea trout). Day ticket. One of the most sought after cotos in Spain. Good from April through June, but at its very best in May. Best fishing is in the 700m section from the Monasterio de

‘Top class water in a stunning location all to yourself for the week!’



Villanueva in Cangas de Onís downstream past Caño to the *pasarela peatonal* (footbridge).

This area has very deep pools and rock ledges where fish like to lie up. The limestone rocks give the river a clarity and blue-green colour, somewhere between an alpine stream and an English chalkstream depending on the depth and the nature of the *pozos* (deep pools), *tabladas* (glides) and *torrente* (riffles).

The *pozos* here monopolise salmon captures on the river. In 2005, 68 salmon were caught here, making that its second best season over last 30 years. 1,082 salmon in total were caught from the river in 2005.

Directions: travel on the N-634 and exit south at Arriendas N-625 past Cangas de Onís to Caño.

PROFILE

Phil Pembroke has fished all over the Iberian peninsula and organises fly-fishing trips there. He is the author of many books on fly-fishing in Spain, Portugal and France.

3. Coto de Sobrado, Río Selmo Castilla-Leon

This is a small mountain day-ticket river with crystal clear water set in a stunning location. There are mostly hard fighting and plentiful brown trout but some huge rainbows up to 13lb in the upstream section that have escaped from the fish farm. June is the best time to visit.

The stony bottom provides plenty of holding areas to target fish. The alder trees afforded good cover on the banks. During the early season, gold-headed Nymphs work best, but they must be weighted sufficiently to withstand the strong current. Dry flies to use include *secas son imitaciones de olivas y pardones*

(dry flies in imitation olive and browns size 14 or 12). As the water warms up switch to a large *trícóptero* (sedge) size 16-20 in *carne*, *amarillo limón*, *oliva clara*, *salmon* (flesh, yellow or lemon, bright olive, salmon pink). Fish from upstream at the Puente Cabeza de Campo until the Puente Sobrado. The stretch is 5km long.

Directions: take the A-6, past Ponferrada if coming via León or exit before Ponferrada if coming via Lugo or La Corunna. Take the left turn towards Toral de los Vados on the N-120. In a few kilometres there is a turn off towards the Valle del Selmo, by Frieria, Sobrado and Cabeza de Campo.

4. Coto de Villagonzalo II, Río Tormes Salamanca province, Castilla-Leon

The Río Tormes is the only Spanish river in which the Huchó freshwater salmon has managed to adapt itself completely to its surroundings. Until only a very few years ago its population density was quite high, with catches all along the river.

This is the best coto. It's day ticket. Situated from the *azud de la central de Mirat* in Villagonzalo (power station) up to the *puente nuevo* (bridge) de Encinas de Abajo. This coto is 6km long.

The angling season for huchó is from the third week in May through August 15. The best time for capture is start of the season at dawn. In June 2003, 10 huchó salmon were caught on this coto by just two anglers. The largest was 85cm in length most were between 50 and 65cm long. Salamanca angler Ignacio Hernandez de Vega caught a 44lb salmon in 1993.

The most suitable bait would be an artificial fish, although spinners (between 9-13cm long), streamers and flies should not be ruled out. Cast into slower current near the bank or into deeper pools. **Directions:** From Salamanca south-east take C-510 to Alba, then south SA-120 towards Encinas de Arriba.

5. Coto de Alfarrás, Río Noguera Ribagorzana near Alfarras Lérida province, Catalonia

One of the oldest and best day-ticket *coto intensivo* (stocked water) in Catalonia, it was established 25 years



Phil's Spanish fly box. For salmon, Ally Shrimps or Stoats Tail are particularly effective. His recommended trout flies include the F Fly (utilising CdC for buoyancy), Elk Hair Caddis, Coq de Leon and Klinkhamer. A Woolly Bugger can be deadly!



ago. It is 12 km long, but divided into three sections. The upstream 3km section is the most popular, containing the largest fish; mostly rainbow trout up to 4½lb (although some reach 17½lb!)

This is crystal clear water with an average channel width between 8-12m and a depth of less than 1.5m. It is characterised by sections of strong current alternating with short *tabladas* (slower sections) and clear pools where the biggest fish hold up. Pink or salmon coloured nymphs work well here. It's good downstream of the bridge by Alfarras. The morning's nymphing gives way at lunchtime to small *dipterous* (segdes) and *ephemerillas* (upwings). Between 700-900 hard fighting rainbow trout are stocked every Friday, so it's a good place to take beginners or children. There's disabled access too.

Day tickets cost €9 from: Alfarras, Bar Torrent 2, Avda, Lleida 25. Tel. 973 76 06 58:

Directions: From Lleida take the 230 north to Alfarrás (about 20km).

6. Coto El Rincón - Río Turia Valencia

Catch and release, (rainbow trout, some brown trout). 7 metres average channel width. Easy place to fish, not too much bank-side vegetation. Day tickets available locally from: Hostal Domingo de Ademuz. Lots of good size rainbows up to 11lb. **Directions:** take València west A-3 exit north at Utiel N-330 to Ademuz, which is just south of Rincón.

7. El Tablazo, Reservado de Pesca, Río Júcar Castilla la Mancha

The stocked lake is situated next to a nice hotel. It's a great place to practice fly-fishing because of the various

Above left: Hanningfield reservoir but with a more impressive backdrop – the Embalse de Barcena near Ponferrada in Castilla-Leon didn't make it into the top 10, but contains some excellent trout and rainbows and is best fished from a boat.

Above right: Treasure from the Río Turia, Valencia.

conditions the 8,000 sq metres lake has to offer. A river enters via a waterfall at one end of the lake and flows out the other end. Three floating barrages are provided for anglers as well as a central island for casting into the current. There are deep holes, and weedy zones. Orange streamers work well here. There are trout here of around 8½lb.

Visit October through March when there are far less visitors about. The centre is open only at weekends. Catching a large tagged trout that the authorities stock at the lake during low season will secure a prize, eg one day's free angling. Good luck!

A two-tier system is in operation:

a) *Pesca Muerte* (catch and keep) – €9 per day including first kilo of trout caught. Thereafter €4.8 for every extra kilo of trout bagged. b) *Pesca Sin Muerte* (catch-and-release) – €15 per day.

Directions: The lake is 200km west of València. From Cuenca head north for 20km on CM2105 to Villalba de la Sierra. Contact: El Tablazo, Camino de la Noria, s/n. Villalba de la Sierra (Cuenca). Tel./fax 969 28 14 88.

8. Coto de Riofrío, Río Ríofrío/Río Salado Loja, Granada province, Andalucía

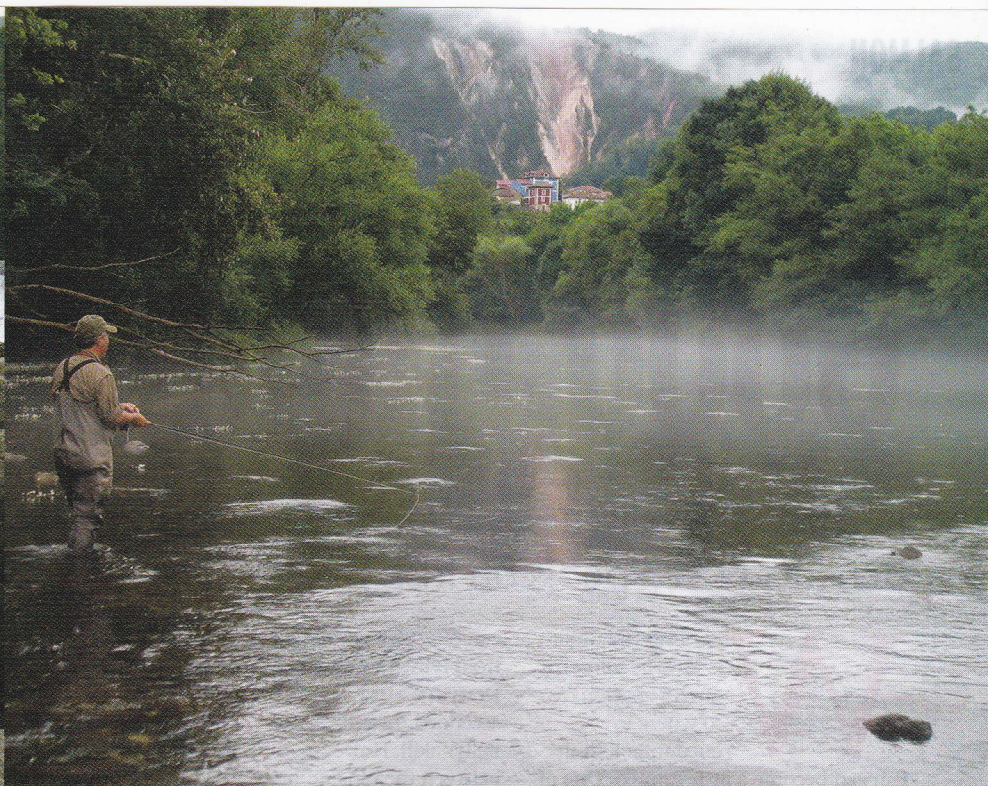
The coto is located in the north-east foothills of the Sierra de Loja, where there exists one of the largest aquifer water reserves in Granada province. Fishing here dates back as far as 1664 and recorded catches have been produced. Trout live in stretches of river where the channel flows through the undergrowth and past galleries of poplar, willow and eucalyptus trees.

A good atmosphere to fish in, it's easy to catch rainbows around 2-4lb with the chance of some big 'uns up to 11lb. Open all year. 10-fish limit. Total stretch is 4.4 km in length.

The last 800m of the downstream section by the confluence with the private fishing



Left: Salmon fishing is also a part of Spanish fishing, especially in Asturias.



reserve, is very good for nymph flies at dusk by the bridge. The larger fish are usually caught further downstream of the artificial pools. Use a weighted nymph in the morning then, at midday in summer try a dry fly e.g. *efemeras* and *plecopteros*. In the Autumn *dipterous* (nymphs – *tipúlidos* size 12).

Day tickets are obtained locally at: Albergue de Pescadores de Río Frío, Riviera de Riofrío s/n 18300 Loja (Granada) Tel, (0034) 958 32 31 77.

Directions: The coto is equidistant from Málaga and Granada on the A-92 motorway.

9. Coto de Pesca de Arive, Río Irati Navarre.

Catch and release. Fish from the Puente de la carretera de Arive downstream to the *presa* (dam) situated downstream of the *exclusa* (lock) at Arive. Try fishing from the Puente de Arive to the first meander. The *zona de la presa* and *punte colgante* (suspension bridge) is less prolific, but holds larger fish, up to 43cm. 2.5km long, there are also two swims for disabled anglers located here.

Potentially this is the best trout river in Navarra. Specimens reach 75cm in length. Traditionally it has been a big fish river, many reaching 15lb, especially from this particular coto. This was the location where the *guardería de medio ambiente* (angling centre) saw a *pescador sin muerte* (catch-and-release angler) for the first time. The fisherman was Ernest Hemingway. Heading for the nearest bar he declared: "The Irati is the best river in Europe. It is the best tramo in Navarra. I am tremendously excited by this river and its possibilities." **Directions:** From Pamplona drive north east via Burguete to Arive.

10. Río Arenteiro. Ourense province, Galicia

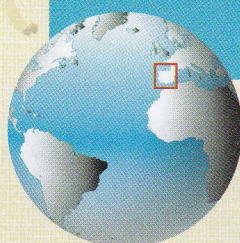
This is the prettiest stretch on the whole river. It is 4km long. Tramo situated before the *desembocadura* (confluence) with the Río Avia. Downstream of Carballiño the Río Arenteiro is sensational. Especially good at the *pozo dos fumes*.

Directions: From Ourense drive north-west N-541 to Carballiño.

Above left: A foot bridge below the water fall on the Rio Sella, near the Hotel Salmonera, Cano.

Above right: A gentle reach of the Rio Sella freewater below Las Rosas, Asturias.

— 'The first catch-and-release angler he saw on the Irati was Ernest Hemingway'



- Phil Pembroke has written a book called *Pescando a Mosca – Fly-Fishing in Spain*, which includes information on locations and angling licences throughout Spain. More information on 01708 764 696. E-mail philippembroke007@hotmail.com
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