

## ***Slovenia 2005 by Liz Browning***

***Photos courtesy of Deb Pinniger and Gene17***

Not to be outdone by the boys' epic foreign paddling adventure in Uganda, I decided to have one of my own and booked myself onto one of Simon Westgarth's Gene17 courses. There are 3 levels of white water courses provided by Gene17 – Elemental (II-III), Fundamental (III-IV) and Progressive (IV+). The Fundamental course is held on the mighty Soča in Slovenia, which runs from the Julian Alps in North West Slovenia to Trieste in Italy, and varies from tranquil class I to the intimidating Syphon Canyon (IV-V).



Simon coaches Liz

The course is all-inclusive (except flights) with a superb maximum coaching ratio of 1 to 3 (or in our case 3 participants to 2 instructors) – and when the instructors are the likes of Simon himself, Deb Pinniger and Dave Carroll, you know it's going to be a good week both in terms of the paddling and the company!



Liz on a grade 3

Anyway, enough of the free advertising for Gene17! The first morning was spent with a gear review and boat outfitting. We were each kitted out with a Pyranha boat (H2 or H3, although Dagger creek boats are also available), and Simon went through our kit, pointing out the good and bad points of it all. The day finished with an introductory paddle progressing from class II to IV so our instructors could gauge our ability. It also allowed us to acclimatise ourselves with the river, which is very different to UK white water, in that the gradient is much more shallow, the rapids being formed by large boulder constrictions instead. This makes for large eddies with defined eddy lines and hence is much easier to lead, but the volume is much greater.

The following 3 days were spent on 2 sections of the river focussing on core skills such as proactive forward paddling, body position and trunk rotation. Our rolls were also dissected and put back together in a hopefully better way!

The last 2 days' paddling were a consolidation of the skills gained during the week, culminating in a class IV canyon on the upper section of the Soča. There was no pressure to paddle anything we didn't want to with the emphasis being on doing what we were happy doing, and making lines that WE thought we could make. Simon's coaching style is relaxed and positive, with daily individual reviews of the day's paddling, goals set and targets achieved. Socially, the week was great fun, with Simon and Deb taking us



Liz nails the grade 4 canyon

out for dinner or cooking for us in our apartment, and regaling us with tales of their kayaking travels!

I came away from the week having improved my core skills and more importantly my confidence as those of you who have paddled with me know is my biggest stumbling block. I'm now a bit happier to actually lead on a rapid rather than being glued to the back of Mark or Nig's boats! Oh, and I'm desperate to go back!

If this has whetted your appetite for a Gene17 course, then go to [www.gene17.com/kayaking](http://www.gene17.com/kayaking) for details of this and other Gene17 courses.



Mr Westgarth!



The river Soča

