

The Complete Fly Fisherman

Africa's fresh and salt water fishing magazine

**TIGERFISH
ZAMBEZI
GRANDE**

**LARGEMOUTH
TALKING TO
THE EXPERTS**

**FLY-TYING
PROFILE:
SEMPERFLI**

**SALT WATER
HUNTING GTS
FROM SHORE**

**HOMEGROWN
THE STORY
BEHIND JVICE**

**GIANT PIKE OF
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ISSUE 268 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2019



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EDITOR'S CAST



Various news outlets recently reported that the ocean around Cape Town is so polluted that fish are literally being poisoned and may become deadly to humans when consumed. To make matters worse, we are not only talking about pollution caused by sewage (apparently Cape Town pumps 37 million litres a day of largely untreated sewage into the ocean from various marine and other outlets) but also historically the areas around those outlets regularly fail minimum water quality tests. Particularly alarming is that many chemicals such as antibiotics, painkillers, antiretrovirals, disinfectants and a wide variety of industrial chemicals are now being detected in parts of fish that we traditionally consume. While the pharmaceutical compounds are mainly introduced into the system through sewage, the industrial chemicals end up in the ocean in a variety of ways, including stormwater, streams and rivers. At present it seems that officials are failing to properly manage the sewage discharge as well as the other pollutants, which, according to DEA regulations, should be treated at source. Water quality tests are no longer made public, which leaves one to wonder why. Left unchecked this spells doom for the fish population around the southern point of our continent and knock-on effects will no doubt include irreparable harm to the environment and, in its finality, job losses as a result of a suffering commercial fishing industry, not to mention the health risks associated with consuming toxic fish. This all just leaves a bad taste in one's mouth, pun intended.

I had just read the articles dealing with this issue when a day or two later I received a message from Richard Schumann, well-known local fly fisherman, guide and passionate environmentalist. Richard, of course, was aghast at this news and wanted to know if I knew about it. He travels the world's oceans on a research vessel and has seen firsthand the effects of pollution, even in remote areas where humans seldom go or are allowed to set foot, so he knows what an unchecked problem can ultimately result in. He also pointed me to an article in a recent issue of *TIME* magazine written by Peter Thomson, the UN

It's time to come to the party

Secretary-General's special envoy for the ocean. Thomson points out that if water temperatures rise 1.5% - 2% over industrial levels, changing and worsening weather patterns worldwide will be exacerbated. If you have watched the news anytime recently, you will know that is already happening. Once we go above 2% coral reefs die, which will have disastrous effects on the ocean's aquatic biodiversity. The eye-opener is that a 3% to 4% rise is already in the configuration and you don't have to be a brain surgeon to conclude what catastrophe that will entail.

So, here's the good news. There is a plan. It can work but needs people from all walks of life to buy into and implement the proposals. As a global community we need to support the Paris Agreement. We also need new legislation to better protect the ocean's biodiversity. The goal of protecting 30% of the world's oceans has gained growing scientific consensus, and we need to do this within the next decade. According to Thomson there is a lot we can do on a personal level too. Start by only consuming fish caught from sustainable legal stock, limit your carbon footprint, work towards not using nonessential plastics and support more scientific research to better understand our oceans and the effects humans are having on them. From a personal perspective, being a fly fisherman has resulted in my becoming much more aware of what is happening to the environment in general. It has also awakened a sense of conservation and the need for protection and regulation of our natural environment and the use/abuse thereof. And, as far as I can tell, most other fly fishermen feel the same way.

Spending as much time as we do in nature we often see what's happening firsthand, so let's do our little bit. Apart from Thomson's noble aspirations, also sweat the small stuff. Pick up litter wherever you encounter it on your journeys next to a river or stillwater, report pollution and abuse of resources, make yourself a nuisance to your political representative on conservation issues and strive to educate others. Also, limit your use of plastic and do not introduce it into the environment at all. Start by discarding used tippet and leader into a container that you can properly dispose of once at home. It can make for a handy ashtray as well. Used cigarette butts on a riverbank are not only disgusting but also bad for the environment. (Fishpond makes a great product called a Piopod for this exact purpose.)

Reminds me of a quote by a famous astronaut a long time ago and look where we are today. It may be a small step, but it's one in the right direction.

See you on the water.

PJ Jacobs - Editor

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Canadian trophy pike

PHOTO BY:
Rasmus Ovesen





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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

Win a Sage Pulse

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if your letter is chosen as "Letter of the Month".

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Persistence prevails

I've been an avid fly fisherman for the best part of 12 years. I've had the privilege of catching plenty of fresh water species including tigerfish, vundu, sharptooth catfish, smallmouth yellowfish, carp, bass, trout, even a *platanna* once. But the elusive largemouth yellow never found its way to the end of my tippet. Until it finally happened on 24 August this year. A date that will be forever etched in my mind as the best fishing day I've ever had. The day started with a bit of a setback as the trolling motor on our boat did not want to work for some reason. The battery was fully charged and all the connections carefully checked. But that could not keep us (me and my fishing buddy Erns du Plessis) away from a promising spot about 1.5km upstream from where we could get the inflatable in the water. We got the oars out and started paddling. At around 10 o'clock we finally got to our spot and started fishing. Cast after cast I hoped that something would take what's on offer. After an hour and a half of non-stop casting the first take snapped my 7.2kg leader like it was nothing. I was shattered because I knew it had to be a largie. My buddy had already caught two largies with his spinning rod and I knew we were in the right spot. I tied on a stronger tippet and started casting again. About an hour later, all hell broke loose. At first I thought I had hooked a catfish because of the weight I felt at the end of my line. It was definitely something huge. About ten minutes into the fight, I saw the fish for the first time. It was a sight I will never forget, the sheen of its silver body glistening under the African sun. At that moment I knew this was it, the time had come! The shakes got a hold of me and I could barely stand, my hands were numb and my heart raced like crazy. I just kept praying, "Please, please, please don't come off my line." My buddy netted the fish and I erupted with joy; I think that yell must have been heard for a couple of kilometres. Finally I landed my first largie and on

my own fly. We weighed the fish, took a quick couple of photos and safely released the beauty back into its watery home. When the fish strongly swam away, it all hit me. After 12 years of fly fishing, an endless number of casts, every bit of hard work, every blanked day, all the Vaal shuffles, bruised shins and toes, sore back and shoulders – all of that led me to this day. I landed the fish of a lifetime, a 7.65kg largemouth yellowfish. I couldn't help but burst into tears. And then Erns started crying as well! Here we were, two guys who have fished together for over a decade, hugging each other in an inflatable in the middle of the Vaal River, crying like babies. This is what fishing is about. All the cares in the world could not bother us in that moment, two friends doing what they love, blessed and rewarded with this, the ultimate South African yellowfish! Andre Barnard.

Yes Andre – I agree, as do many others; largemouth yellowfish are certainly something special and should be cherished, each and every one, irrespective of size. Congratulations on your magnificent fish, once again proof that persistence and hard work tend to deliver good results. Your letter was chosen as our "Letter of the Month" and a great Sage fly rod to the value of R7250, compliments of TCFF and the boys at Frontier Fly Fishing, will be on its way to you as soon as you contact our offices on (012) 371-3915 with your details. Incidentally, be sure to check out the series of articles we will be publishing featuring interviews with some of the most experienced largemouth experts in the country. We kick off this month with Ian Courtyer, and his take on how to increase your success rate is well worth considering. Tight loops, Ed.

Return of the prodigal

Boksburg, Wednesday 9 January 1974. I was born with no physical affliction but everyone close to me very soon realised that I had an extreme affinity with water. Any water. From a storm-water canal to the ocean, I simply couldn't control myself. I had an insatiable urge to catch fish! My late father was never nearly as keen, but him and my mom managed to keep me from losing the plot. I'd spent weekend upon weekend on the Elands and Blaauboschkraal rivers near Waterval Boven, chasing wild rainbows with my little 2-wt Hardy Sovereign, which, by the way, cost me R1500 back in 1995 – my whole first paycheck! At that time it was my opinion – and of course that of the fly shop owner – that the Orient hadn't yet caught up with the English and Americans as far as rod building goes, and the chasm was wide. That pretty little rod was a great investment. My dreams were made of fly rods and drag-free drifts, campfires by the river, girls and smoking cigarettes. A quality fly rod was much more than just a fishing tool, it was a part of me, an extension of my existence, so to speak. I spent 11 years in New Zealand where I had the privilege of casting massive tungsten-beaded



continued on page 75

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NEWSWORTHY

WHAT'S UP

TCFF Sterkfontein Experience

TCFF Editor **PJ JACOBS** reports back on the November 2018

TCFF Sterkfontein Yellowfish Experience, and looks at what's in store for our 2019 event.



After more than two decades of fishing Sterkfontein Dam, hosting TCFF events and spending many, many pleasurable hours on what must be one of our prime fisheries, I think it fair comment to say that we've come to know and understand this venue pretty well. It's a fantastic destination by most standards and if you've spent a fair time on its waters, you will no doubt agree that the one thing you can never bank on is the weather. The TCFF Sterkfontein Experience over the years has always proved a popular choice for anglers wishing to have the best possible experience on Sterkies, irrespective of weather and fishing, and believe me, we've had the best (and worst) of both. From beautiful, warm, flat-calm days to heavy winds, rain and hail, Sterkies has it, sometimes all in one day. Traditionally, the most stable conditions at Sterkies were towards the end of the sea-

son in February and March, with weather patterns settling as the end of summer approached. March especially (and even into early April) sometimes produced absolutely sublime fishing, with most of the younger fish starting to school in deeper waters, thus affording the large females ample opportunity to patrol the banks in search of food as they fatten up for winter. This is when you can realistically expect to take a trophy, although opportunities will be fewer than in high summer when the fish, irrespective of size, are all very active.

With this in mind, we have in the past scheduled events over the March period, hoping to offer our clients a more stable weather experience. Many years back we did two years consecutively where we had events both in March and November. If memory serves, March was good in both instances, weather-wise, so last year we

decided to try again and capitalise on the usually good March weather prospects. However, as a sobering reminder of how climate change is affecting the whole world, we had the worst weather in all of our more than 20 years of hosting the TCFF Sterkfontein Experience. It was still a great event with the participants, guides and skippers making the very best of the conditions, but to be truthful, we did not get a fair shake from the weather. In total contrast, last November's event went down smooth as can be weather-wise, being blessed with some of the most stable weather we have experienced at this venue – compliments of the changing weather patterns, I presume. Weather rules fishing as any angler will tell you, so we gave March this year a miss, and just as well. I kept an eye on the weather for all of March and it was mostly pretty awful. I am hopeful that if the last two November events are



anything to go by, we can expect more of the same stable conditions this November, so here at TCFF we are really looking forward to it.

Scheduled to take place over 7 - 10 November, this year's event – apart from all the favourite happenings including the

prize-giving where we give away prizes in excess of several hundred thousand rand on a lucky-draw basis with each participant receiving a prize – will see some changes to make it an even more memorable Sterkfontein Experience. Our guest speaker for the event is quite a celebrity and having recently been appointed our

International Field Editor-at-Large, most of you will be familiar with Hans van Klinken. Apart from having fished the globe far and wide, Hans is a fly-tyer of note, having designed several famous patterns over the years, the venerable Klinkhamer being one. The good news is that apart from his scheduled talk for





the event, he will also be on hand to demonstrate how to tie some of his famous patterns, answer questions and just generally socialise with all participants. He tells us that he is mustard-keen to have a crack at our yellows, and what better place to introduce him than the sight-fishing dry fly paradise that is Sterkfontein? Throw in some of the best yellowfish guides in the country, seaworthy boats and qualified skippers, and add to that the fact that we are hosting the event at Qwantani Resort where you can expect great accommodation, excellent

food, great service and safe launching facilities, this is going to be an event to remember, for sure!

We are booking up fast, and I am not sure whether there will be any slots open by the time this is published, but you can book your spot or get more information, by checking out our Facebook page, e-mail: info@completeflyfisherman.co.za or phone Dylan or Lizelle at our offices on Tel: (012) 371-3915. As for last year's event, it was a great success as will be evident from the photographs accompa-

nying this report. We were also fortunate to give away more than R300,000 in prizes, thanks to our most generous and supportive sponsors, many of whom have come a long way with this prime event on the fly fishing calendar.

In conclusion, allow me a good shout-out to the sponsors, guides, skippers and staff who all contribute handsomely to make this event what it has become – a proudly South African world-class fly fishing experience! Hope to see you there.

Top, clockwise, from left to right:
 Guide of the Event Gareth Corbett walks away with the prize of a once-off colour-anodised Shilton CR3 reel valued at R7000.
 Veteran Sterkies angler Heather Ralph took the prize for Angler of the Event, a Sage Igniter fly rod worth R14,000, generously sponsored by Present A Fly.
 All the way from George, Runner-up Angler of the Event Charl Koen receives a Dragon fly rod and reel, sponsored by The Village Angler in Dullstroom and Dragon Fishing, valued at R6000.
 Loubser de Kock wins Second Runner-up Angler of the Event and gets to take home an ARK Prawn to the value of R3500.
 Richard Schumann walks away with a Corland hamper sponsored by Flyz Inc.
 Eddie Mortimer grinning from ear to ear as he lays his hands on an original Gavin Erwin yellowfish drawing.

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Old-school flair

Remember the time when there weren't any footpaths, just grass that merged with the melting asphalt roads? Moana Rd is a New Zealand brand that celebrates a foregone time when life was simple and Hokey Pokey ice creams were "big as". A time when baches were simple boxes surrounded by huge lawns for BYC (Back Yard Cricket) and kids entertained themselves for weeks on end without a device in sight. Moana Rd products tap into that NZ of old with an eclectic mix of quirky, old-school Kiwiana. A **range of polarised eyewear** is part of the Moana Rd offering with styles harking back to old-school looks, including this pair of 50/50 sunnies that reduces glare from surfaces such as water, snow and glass, and sporting 50% bamboo arms and 50% plastic frame.

Price: R550



Available from www.flydertrading.co.za

Kryptek's **Trireme short** features four-way UV40 stretch material designed to be quick-drying, lightweight, comfortable and durable enough to hold up to anything you get up to in the outdoors. Featuring a security zip, draw cord/Velcro with gusset fly, drain holes in the pocket, plier pocket and classic board-short cut, it is great for fishing, surfing or those hot days out on the beach.

Price: R1000



WHAT'S NEW GEAR BAG

Eye-watering all-rounder

When two powerhouses like Patagonia and Danner get together to make the ultimate wading boot, you know it's going to be something special! The new **Danner River Salt Boot** – designed for all applications from high-altitude stream fishing to tropical flats fishing – is an all-in-one boot that is both comfortable and durable. The uppers combine waterproof, full-grain leather with tough yet light 1000 denier nylon panels providing the protection you need from river rock and coral heads. Adjustable speed lacing provides a customised fit across the forefoot and through the ankle for support on uneven surfaces. On the interior, a moulded bi-fit board combines the shank, midsole and lasting board into a single piece that reduces weight without sacrificing comfort or durability. Securing the uppers to the soles, handcrafted stitchdown construction creates a wide, stable platform and allows the boots to be easily resoled for performance that's measured in decades. The Vibram Megagrip sole compound was specifically developed for traction on both wet and dry surfaces, stands up to miles of dirt-road walk-ins and sharp coral flats, and works just as well for everyday fishing at the home pool. The soles also accept studs for additional traction. **Price: R9500**



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New Sage dry fly rod

With a delicate touch and medium action, the **TROUT LL family of rods** has been designed with the trout angler and dry flies in mind. Through blank taper optimisation and specialised length offerings, the TROUT LL is perfect for wade fishing, closer casts, small flies and light tippets. A relatively supple tip maximises light tippet protection and gives way to a smooth, easy-loading mid-section that increases feel and feedback throughout the casting stroke. When the hatch is on, the TROUT LL is an angler's best friend. Drawing inspiration from historic Sage rods of the past, the TROUT LL is a nod towards tradition with a classic appearance and a smooth casting taper, yet adds modern performance features in accuracy and loop control through the backbone of Konnetic HD blank material. Available in a combination of classic dry fly line weights and lengths 7'9" through 9'0".

SRP: R14,000



Contact Frontier Fly Fishing
on (011) 463-9048

New technical line

RIO's **Euro Nymph Shorty** is an ultra-thin, super-sensitive fly line designed for Euro nymphing. The line is deliberately made short (20ft) so it can be added to the front end of a regular fly line utilising the thin welded loop on each end. The idea is that anglers can fish their normal fly fishing style with their regular trout line, and when they come to a run they want to fish Euro-nymph style, they simply loop the Shorty on and start nymphing. Quick, easy and no need for an extra rod or reel. To suit lines 2- to 5-wt. **SRP: R500**



Available from select tackle dealers nationwide

WHAT'S NEW GEAR BAG

Out-of-the-box thinking



Firehole is a company passionate about its beads, having spent two years testing hundreds of colour options to bring you a unique line of beads called **Firehole Stones**, including a perfect matte finish that is hard and refractive, the only all-matte offering in the fly-tying industry currently. These round tungsten beads come in 23 colours and in sizes 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5 and 4.0mm. Available in four plated finishes (silver, copper, nickel, gold), and in 17 paint colours, some of which include: slate blue, black, autumn, olive, fire orange, dark olive, cream fluorescent puff, caddis green fluorescent, screaming red, pink panther, true red, white, very berry. **Price: R105 - R115/box**

Having designed its entire range of barbless fly-tying hooks from scratch, Firehole's **Sticks** are available in 15 hook types and sizes, covering the gamut from nymph hooks, egg hooks, heavy streamer hooks, emergers, Czech nymphs, scud and pupae, down eye, medium to extra heavy weight wire, and more. **Price: R100/box**

All Firehole Sticks and Stones are packaged in a polypropylene plastic box (2.4" x 1.8" x 0.6") which is designed so that boxes can be connected together side-by-side for storage purposes. Each box contains 36 individual hooks or beads, unless otherwise stated (model 811 contains 28 hooks).

Available from www.flydertrading.co.za

Stormsure must-haves

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Tying for Success

IAN COURYER gives a few tips on making your fly-tying sessions more enjoyable and how to up your game on the water when it comes to fly selection and having faith in a pattern.

As the weather warms after our short winter, I find myself staring with longing at a panoramic shot I took last season of the Lambonja River valley looking up towards the towering peaks of the escarpment. With the Vaal still on the back burner for me, thankfully river trout season is here again. Although at many places now there doesn't seem to be a closed season, I, for one, always feel the trout do deserve some respite. Part of the fun of fishing is looking forward to something new and restocking the scant overused boxes with fresh rows of new hopefuls. As each fly is meticulously and lovingly made, a plan of action is devised and the all-important mojo and confidence is built in with each perfect twist of dubbing – something that I find is absent in mass-produced flies.

I remember in my earliest fly-tying life I could never tie more than one or two of a pattern before my mind raced ahead and I tried to improve on what I had done with a new technique or by incorporating a different material. The resulting chaos in my fly boxes led to a proliferation of similar patterns with an unproved track record which resulted in a distrust that led to underuse. These days my minimum stocking requirement is half a dozen of a pattern of each size, and I know what flies I like to fish and what works. This has automatically led to less variety in fly types, especially for stream fishing for trout – simpler is better. Tying at least six or 12 identical flies hones your tying skills in a way that a couple of each will never do. Not many

will get it perfect the first or even second time, and anything less than your best tying efforts will lead to a lack of fishing confidence and prompt you to pick from most of your intended choices to select the “best one”. The result: you will be defeated if you lose it to a fish or the stream.

As with many things in our busy, multi-faceted lives, it is doubtful that we will reach the 10,000 hours required for complete mastery of a leisure skill, so it's important to tie without unreasonable time constraints and to slow down and concentrate on every wrap of thread. I have learnt a couple of things about fly-tying in my time, and I believe everyone could be a better tyer if they used these tips for tying insect-sized dries and nymphs.

“TYING AT LEAST SIX OR 12 IDENTICAL FLIES HONES YOUR TYING SKILLS...”

Firstly, tie with the thinnest thread you have at your disposal. These days, you get some excellent super-strong threads that are unbelievably thin. This will reduce bulk in your fly and, most importantly, at the head of the fly. Secondly, it is a beginner's mistake to crowd the head of the fly. Pick a spot on the hook back from the eye, which is the forward point of where you will tie off your materials. Don't *ever* go past this point. This will allow you to form a neat, small, uncluttered head on the fly every time. No more materials poking over the eye. Thirdly, if you fall into the category of requiring reading glasses for your

tying, get yourself a stand-alone magnifying glass. Magnifying a fly will allow you to see flaws, resulting in your tying neater, more precise flies. Try it, you will be amazed at the results.

Because I like to fish dry fly as often as possible, over the years I have built up a reasonable repertoire of the best patterns and sizes for the streams I fish most frequently. If you are moderately observant when you fish, you will note differences in the numbers and types of insects that trout consider food, relative to the seasons. Typically, on trout rivers in the Drakensberg and for yellows on the Highveld, early season (spring) adult caddisflies and their pupae tend to be the most prevalent insects to bring on surface action. In high summer, outside of a hatch situation you need to concentrate on terrestrials as this is when their numbers are at a peak, and in autumn mayflies seem to dominate. Just knowing these basic facts will help you defeat rising fish and up your scorecard with an educated dry fly selection as opposed to a lucky dip or simply choosing a fly because you liked the colour. If you fish imitations of the trout food of the moment, you will undoubtedly improve your catch rate.

Within this river dry fly selection, there will always be room for an individual's personal taste. For instance, as mentioned in the past, I am not a fan of the Elk Hair Caddis; I prefer a Stimulator as my adult caddis pattern. Here are a few must-have dries, and where appropriate, tie them to represent the sizes and colours of the naturals on your stream: Stimulator, RAB, beetle, hopper, ant, mayfly spinner, parachute mayfly and Klinkhamer.



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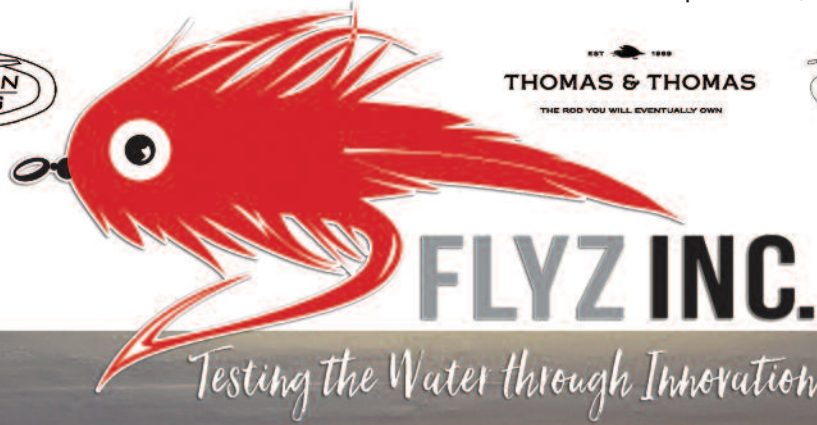
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Transformation

ANDREW FOWLER explains what Frank Sawyer, Alfred Zuma and Feargal Sharkey have in common.

In the circles I move in, Frank Sawyer is known for his Pheasant Tail Nymph, but when I ask my fishing pals what else he has received acclaim for they are a little uncertain. His book *Keeper of the Stream* comes up sometimes. Well, another book about Sawyer published posthumously by his co-writer and longtime friend Sidney Vines is illuminating on the topic of his achievements. In this book, entitled *Frank Sawyer: Man of the Riverside*, Vines explains how Frank Sawyer was puzzled by the fact that, as keeper, it had become necessary for him to stock his beloved River Avon with trout in order to deliver half-decent fishing. How he was perplexed by the fact that the fish were not breeding in the river and seemed reticent to eat the hatching mayflies, and how Sawyer discovered that the layer of acidic leaf matter and muck in the river turned out to be the culprit.

Sawyer orchestrated extensive work on behalf of what was then called the SDFFA, which owned the fishery. This work involved the removal of leaf matter and bankside trees in the 1950s to counter blinding of the porous riverbed, and later in the '60s the introduction of chalk to counter the acidity. Sawyer's theories met with much ridicule at the time because being a man who had left school at the age of 13 and spent his life working a lowly keeper's job he lacked the academic pedigree that was deemed necessary to be taken seriously by those in the know. The transformation of his

river, however, was testimony that he was onto something, regardless of whether or not he was able to explain it academically.

Sawyer's success manifested itself in the fact that he was able to close down the hatchery that he had been instrumental in establishing, and instead attend to the riverine environment, which produced even greater dividends. In recent times a lot of work has been done on the chalk streams backed by more modern science. More on that in the coming months.

“HE IS QUIETLY SPOKEN, AND DELIBERATE IN HIS MOVEMENTS. HE IS ALSO AS OBSERVANT AS FRANK SAWYER, AND AS PATIENT.”

Enter Alfred Zuma. South Africa. Umgeni River. Alfred works on behalf of the Duzi Umgeni Conservation Trust (DUCT), and he and his small, loyal team of workers have been involved in follow-up work on the upper Umgeni River in KZN after an initial clearing that occurred between 2013 and 2018. During that clearing, conducted under the banner of the #BRU initiative, vast numbers of highly acidic and tannin-producing wattle trees were cut down and also removed from the riverbed. In the summer of 2018, excellent rainfall washed away much of the old wattle detritus lying in the riverbed, and clear gravel was exposed. The results have been spectacular with an increase in fish size and population.

While Alfred's team was involved in some of the initial clearing, most importantly they have also worked annually to control wattle saplings to prevent a return to dark times. Alfred is a polite and dignified man with the greying stubble of a *kehl* and ebony skin that glows in the sunshine. He is quietly spoken, and deliberate in his movements. He is also as observant as Frank Sawyer, and as patient. Sawyer was famous for inventing a humane rabbit trap which he worked on for over 30 years before he got it right. That's patience!

Alfred and the teams that succeed him will need to continue their work for 30 years too. Or should I say “times two”, because wattle seed is known to germinate up to 60 years after it falls from the tree. But Alfred and his ilk are people with a good heart. And as Feargal Sharkey sang in the '80s, “A good heart, these days, is hard to find.”

I was mulling with a friend the other day, as I am wont to do, as to why English chalk streams nowadays need restocking again. “What happened to the gains of Frank Sawyer?” I asked. “Pollution and abstraction,” he answered.

Which brings me to Feargal Sharkey again. Sharkey has become a powerful voice for the English chalk streams and is using his following and public-figure image to lobby against the abuse of these special trout waters. His content on social media, the BBC and elsewhere all centres around abstraction and pollution. Look him up on social media. He needs our support, and I suspect we can learn a lot from him. Zuma and I have certainly learnt a lot from Sawyer.



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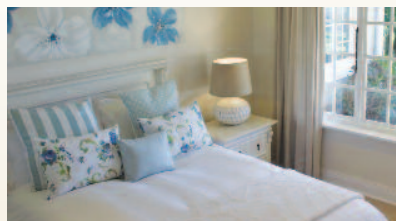
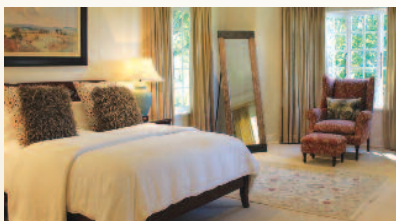
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A man wearing a white fishing suit, a tan cap, and sunglasses is kneeling in shallow water. He is holding a large, dark-colored fish, possibly a trout or salmon, by its mouth. The fish is being held vertically, and the man is looking down at it. The water is dark and rippled.

**“WILLING IT TO HAPPEN,
FISHING IN THE BUBBLE,
EVERY SECOND IS FILLED
WITH OVERPOWERING
ANTICIPATION.”**

Largemouth Yellowfish

THE EXPERT APPROACH: PART I

A fish of a thousand casts, it may take years to bag that trophy largemouth yellowfish on your own.

In this series of articles, Field Editor **MURRAY PEDDER** gets the inside scoop when he talks to three experts in order to fast-track your path to success.

Whenever I hear an angler say, “I am going to target largemouth yellows,” my first question is: “Are you taking a guide with you?” If the answer is no, I immediately think the said angler obviously feels very lucky, or they are going to be using dynamite. As is the case with all fish, time on the water, trial and error and experience is what it takes to figure out how and when to successfully target any specific species. With largemouth yellows, it may not take weeks or months but rather years to eventually know what you are doing and why, and to start achieving a certain amount of success. I agree you can visit certain locations on the Orange and the many private venues or secret spots that guides keep to themselves and get into some fish, but to successfully target trophy largies on the Vaal River takes a great deal of time on the water, experience and self-belief in what you are doing. Less luck and more skill sets the true largie fisherman apart from the casual wannabe like myself. In my opinion, if you can muster up a reasonable amount of success on the Vaal River, you can take largemouth yellows anywhere.

In this series of articles, we will be chatting to three experienced largemouth fishermen, all of whom have their own ideas, approaches and techniques, and although some of what they discuss will overlap, each has his own unique outlook on this magical fish. The three anglers I talk to have guided many clients and friends into some exceptional fish. I’ve had the pleasure of fishing with Ian Couryer in the Seychelles and dealing with Ian in the industry on and off over

many years. The second angler is Garth Wellman. I met Garth for the first time on Christmas Eve in 1996 at Fly Fishing Adventures. We have fished together for smallmouth yellows, trout and bass and have shared the odd bottle of fine whisky on certain trips. Our third angler is Marius Rousseau. A humble man, Marius, as far as I know, dispelled the myth that largemouth yellowfish should only be targeted in winter. Back in the day when I still had my retail store I heard that Marius was taking largies regularly throughout the year. Sadly, I have never had the good fortune of spending time with Marius on the water – something I plan to remedy soon!

Take care to ingest properly what these fly fishermen have to say. I did, and I guarantee you will be better equipped to get out there and chase these incredible fish. Our first conversation in this issue is with Ian Couryer.

MP: Ian, what in your opinion makes largemouth yellowfish such a sublime species to target on fly?

IC: Let me answer that question with a scenario I’ve witnessed and participated in countless times. The fly sails towards the mark, making just a slight plop as it

enters the cold, clear water under the bankside willow. I take up the slack, rod pointed at the target. My eyes strain, glued to the tip of the floating fly line for the slightest, almost imperceptible abnormal movement which may spell success. The fly sinks vertically, pulled into the depths by the weight of the dumb-bell eyes; the rabbit skin tail vibrates enticingly in the current. I brace for a hit, imagining a huge largemouth cruising over to Hoover up the helpless victim. When the fly is a few metres below the surface, I begin a slow, pulsing retrieve, tweaking in a few inches of line at a time, bouncing the line, imparting plenty of movement to the fly without speeding it out of the zone with GT-like strips, and willing the predator to take the struggling morsel. Nothing. No one home.

With four hours of fruitless, mostly pin-point casting and total concentration behind me, I can’t help wondering if today is going to be one of those days when you’ll swear there isn’t a fish in the river and take your blank philosophically – at least the weather has been kind and there are no other anglers out. But it’s too early for defeat. You remember the dozens of times when all seemed lost and then deep into injury time, a spectacular

“BEING ATTACHED TO A RAGING 20LB FISH IS A THRILL THAT IS ALL-CONSUMING, AND THE QUEST FOR A TAKE OF JUST A SECOND, A DRUG.”

silver beast crunches the fly, instantly turning your knees to jelly as you feel the unstoppable weight of a big fish surging into open water. Perhaps a fly change and a few different areas are in order; you fish on with diligence and total concentration as the hours of solitude flash by in minutes. Willing it to happen, fishing in the bubble, every second is filled with overpowering anticipation. A metre of line suddenly snaps to attention and you haul your left hand in a strip-strike. You feel the fly line stretch as the hook bites into something solid. The line skips over the surface creating a shower of spray; the speed is incredible, the power unmistakable, it's largie time! This scenario has played itself out many times over the years and is the essence of largemouth fishing for me. The hard hours and then the reward – a spectacular one! Being attached to a raging 20lb fish is a thrill that is all-consuming, and the quest for a take of just a second, a drug.

It is the almost fanatical commitment to get ahead of the game, learn more, experiment all the time and find a path to greater and more frequent successes. Striving and getting there and then the next blank day, you're back at the beginning, a humbled novice. Lessons are learnt by time on the water, by trial and error, by hard-won experience. I had to fish during many cold fronts before it dawned on me that this was not the time to be out for largemouth. You need to fish in all water clarities to realise clear water is better but not vital in certain circumstances. I believe in harnessing the positive effects the new moon provides in terms of increased fish activity, and bigger fish. I have personally caught a few 20-pounders and guided clients to record fish by concentrating fishing excursions during these times. It's not that you will only get the hogs around new moon, but I believe there is absolutely no doubt this increases your likelihood of running into a feeding "goat head".

In largemouth fishing, you are often on a hiding to nothing as you search for the elusive fish, so every tiny advantage and bit of skill and knowledge is vital and can be make or break. When fishing to structure, especially along riverbanks, 20cm away from spot-on can be the difference between a fish and a missed opportunity. The best largie fishermen (and I've had the privilege of fishing with



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and guiding a few of them) fish at about 90%. That's 90% of casts and lies, and river craft and flies that are good. By contrast, the worst largemouth fisherman I have guided got one cast in an entire day's fishing in what I would call "the zone". He could fish like that literally for decades and still not ever get a touch.

It is said that the largemouth is the fish of a thousand casts; it's a fish of five hundred good, accurate casts and at least a few thousand average to bad ones. If you're a terrible caster and have caught a few largies, you are luckier than most and I would be grateful if you could show me your fishing spot.

MP: What is your approach to successfully targeting them?

IC: I've fished enough to know that drifting for largemouth is not the best way to catch them. By drifting I mean covering a few kilometres of river in a boat, casting at lies and structure as you go. I did a fair bit of that in the earlier days and, while not always a complete waste of time, it comes a distant second to fishing a pool or set of pools or a single venue for a day. Largemouth often home in on the same areas, so it pays to learn a venue's hot spots and build up a repertoire of areas that largies prefer. Fish also often move in and out of areas, so staying put for some time when you are, for example, casting into the wide tail of a large pool on some days may require a couple of hours' work before success is achieved.

If I have to say a few words on what to look for as suitable large habitat: think rocks, current, drop-offs/ledges and deep tails of pools with rocks, current, drop-offs/ledges. Water of between 2m and 4m with rocks and current. Really, there are so many places I have caught them it's difficult to explain them all, but all have good current and a lot of rock structures.

As I love the visual aspect of fishing a floating line, I need to cast upstream or upstream and across to give the fly time to sink to the required depth. This approach also necessitates the use of long leaders to allow this to happen and to keep the fly deep as it fishes, if required. With this method you will catch quite a few fish on the drop by letting the fly simply free-sink down an edge or even in

a promising bit of current. Watching the tip of your fly line, having no slack in the line and leader and being ready to strip-strike will ensure you get most of these fish. In fact, the seconds just after the fly has landed, especially when fishing structure, are the most important so make sure you are ready!

If there is one mistake I've seen a hundred times and one that most first-time largemouth fishermen make (and nearly everyone does) it is to retrieve too fast. Most will start off with a slow retrieve after I have shown them, but in just ten minutes they are back to stripping the fly back fast. Try to slow down and keep the fly where you think the fish are for as long as possible, even if that means crawling it along. Also try to keep the retrieve constant without intermittent pauses so that you always have a tight line – that way you won't miss any takes, no matter how subtle. Believe me, takes can be very soft, especially in cold water. If I feel the slightest resistance when retrieving, I give an immediate strip-strike and it always surprises me how many times it turns out to be a fish.

I normally fish a 16ft leader tapering to 12lb fluorocarbon tippet; logically this can fish your fly down to a depth of around 5m, but it's probably less than that. Moving the fly just faster than the current's speed is how I normally fish and this will keep you in contact with your fly and keep the fly in the strike zone and looking lifelike. I am not a fan of sinking lines and swinging flies for largemouth. I know some guys do catch them this way but for me in all but the deepest, heaviest water, I believe a floating line fished properly will outfish a sinker. I do carry an intermediate line with me for just in case, but seldom use it.

My personal choice of fly rod for largemouth is a fast or medium-fast 7-wt. Currently I am fishing a Composite Developments 9ft 7-wt in a 4-piece, finished to perfection by rod builder Derek Smith. A good casting rod is preferable as a lot of longish, accurate casts are normally required. For years I fished a 6-wt and caught some big fish with it and never felt outgunned. If you want to succeed, it will certainly go a long way to achieving that aim if you fish with the correct equipment. A 5-wt just won't cut it.



MP: How have tactics and flies evolved for this species and how do you incorporate this into your approach today as opposed to when you first started targeting largemouth yellowfish?

IC: On the subject of flies, those used 15 years ago are still relevant, but the types of flies have expanded over time, as one would expect, with more anglers trying to make their mark on the sport with the “silver bullet” fly that no fish can resist. I would recommend concentrating on fishing flies with some semblance of the fish’s natural prey items and concentrate on the correct weighting, retrieve and presentation and then it’s just a matter of putting in the hours. The MSP is still a good fly in clear water, and a #4, in my opinion, is still the best all-round hook size for any largemouth fly. Where I’ve seen a change is that anglers seem to be fishing slightly larger, heavier flies these days, possibly because the Orange River has become a popular destination. The fact is you can catch largemouth on a variety of patterns and getting a fly in front of a fish is often more important than what fly you are presenting, provided it’s at least in the ballpark.

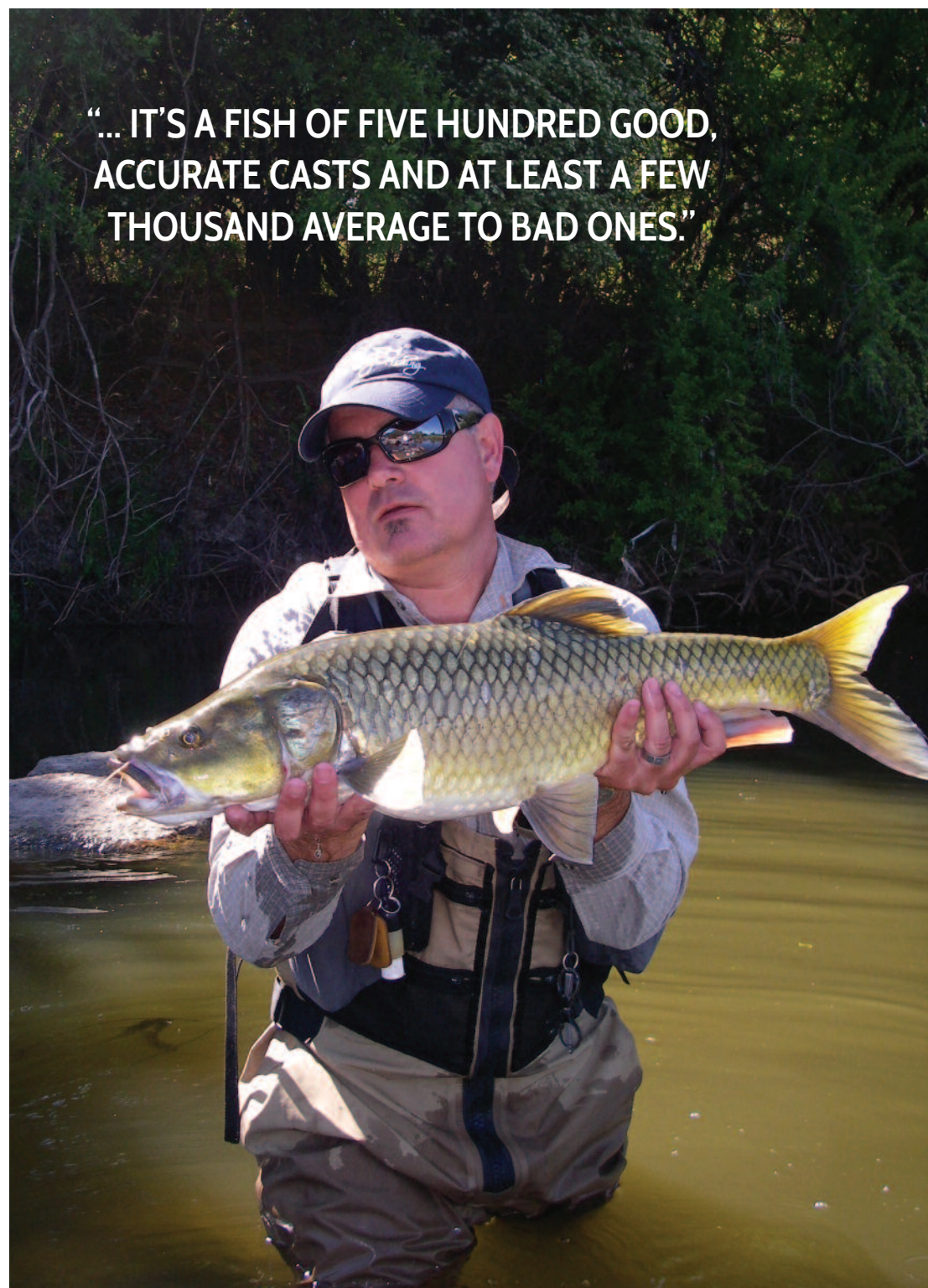
Generally flies should be relatively small, especially in cold water (10 to 14 degrees Celsius) and I’ve found I have gravitated to more natural colours with a hint of flash and colour. Baitfish or pseudo baitfish patterns will continue to be the best all-round patterns if baitfish continues to be the main prey item of the largemouth yellowfish. A good length for a largemouth fly for the Vaal is between 4cm and 8cm. In warmer water (16 to 20 degrees Celsius), I fish the bigger, brighter patterns and with a slightly faster retrieve. Colder water means slower retrieves and smaller flies. At least that’s how I do it as that makes sense to me, and, most importantly, it works. The weight of the fly is very important when fishing a floating line and I tend to vary this from 4mm iBalz on the lighter patterns, and small or medium painted lead dumbbell eyes on the flies for deeper water presentations and stronger currents. My most-used weight is probably 4mm iBalz dumbbells.

My best-producing fly, which has faded into relative obscurity due to its perceived difficulty and time-consuming tying and has been eclipsed by Marius

Rousseau’s Muishond, is still my Go To fly. This is a black fly with a hint of gold and a deer hair head; it certainly has that special something that many fish can’t seem to resist. There is another fly, which is possibly a better producer at certain times, also an all-black fly developed by Gerrit Viljoen which he calls the Largie Toad, but you’ll have to talk to him about that. All my flies are tied with weed guards, and that’s as complicated as it gets for me.

MP: Any final words?

IC: Largemouth fly fishing has been a fascinating journey of discovery. When we started out, relatively little was known about the species and even less about catching them on fly. For me, they are undoubtedly the most rewarding South African fish to catch, their beauty and power is to be savoured and respected and, when you catch one, particularly a big one, you will feel like a hero and that’s a feeling worth fishing for.





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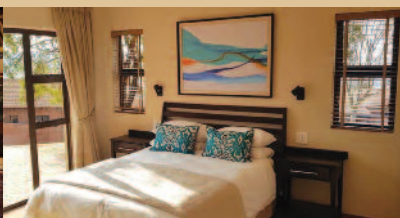
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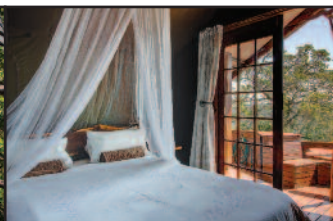
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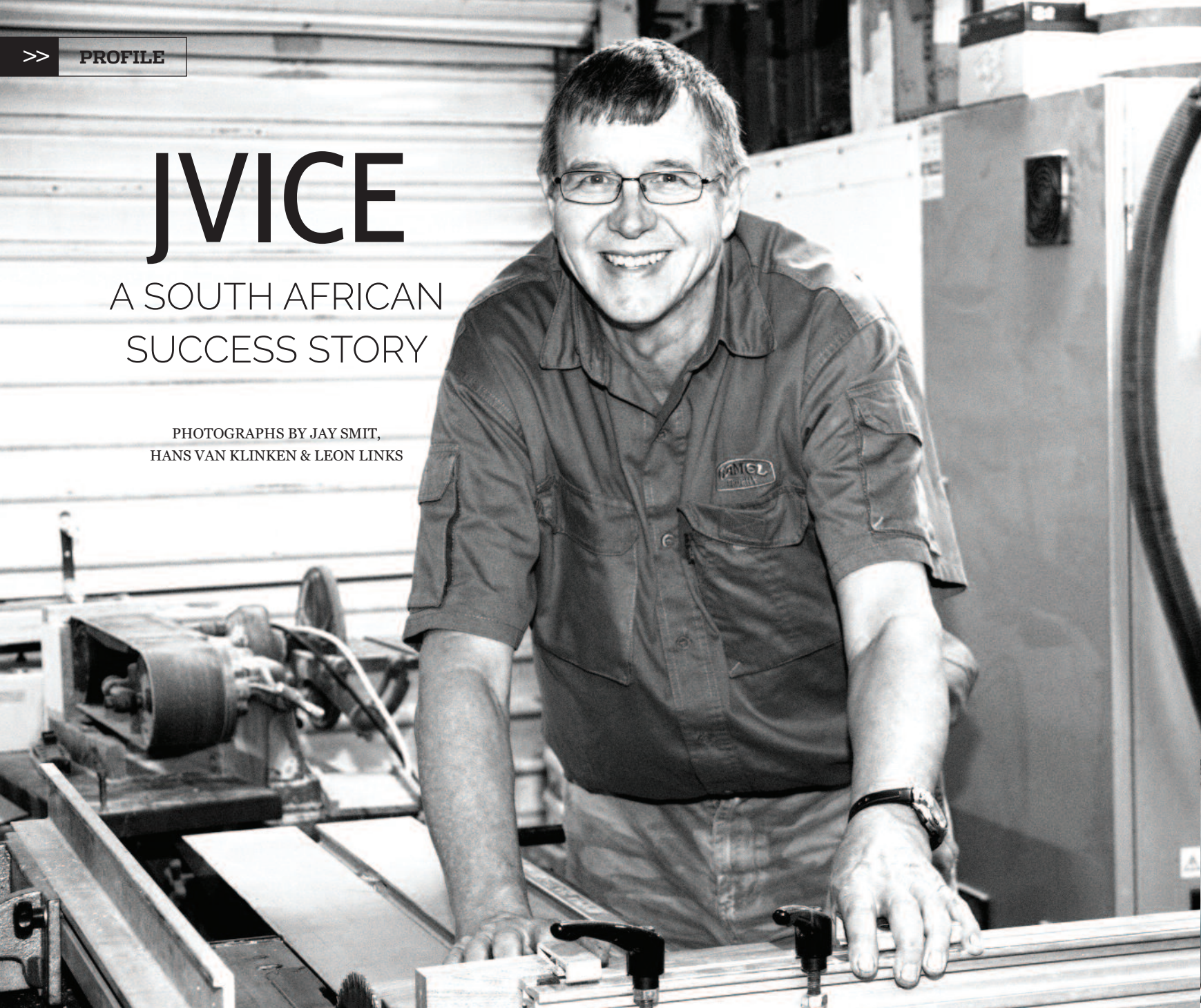


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JVICE

A SOUTH AFRICAN SUCCESS STORY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAY SMIT,
HANS VAN KLINKEN & LEON LINKS



A man who ties thousands of flies each year, **HANS VAN KLINKEN** knows a good vice when he sees it. He tells the story of how South African Jay Smit's JVICE became one of his most prized possessions.

Let me clear up something first. For many non-English-speaking people the word vice or vise always confuses us. My English is far from perfect so I get help from computer software. As all my spell checkers are set to British English, I use the spelling as "vice". In America the word for a clamping tool comprising two jaws that can be opened and closed by a screw or lever is spelt as "vise". But outside America the vise spelling rarely appears. The word vice, however, also has six other

meanings according to the *Collins English Dictionary*, so the English language can get quite confusing.

BACKGROUND AND PROGRESSION

There are many good vices on the market today and competition is fierce. Please don't misunderstand me, I am not a vice junkie or a vice collector, I've just owned several vices over more than 40 years of fly-tying. I've also been quite privileged to tie on many other vices which weren't mine – some were awe-

some and some I didn't like at all, but what I learnt was that you don't need the most expensive vice to make fly-tying a pleasure. A few of the less expensive vices perform quite well too. I also learnt that the vice used by a particular fly-tyer won't necessarily be the perfect one for you.

A good vice to me is when my fly-tying is in perfect harmony with my tools, my materials and my tying techniques. This means that good quality tools are unbe-



lievably important to me. I use my tying equipment almost every day and that's why I often liken a vice to a car. If you drive a lot you probably want great comfort and durability, and since I tie hundreds of hours and thousands of flies each year, I want to have a Volvo or Mercedes among my vices, and not necessarily a Ferrari. My vices work hard and must be extremely durable and reliable. All the more because I also do a lot of workshops, classes and tying demonstrations all over the world, and I don't want my vice to fail or give me problems while busy tying for the public.

A vice is a very personal choice and that's why I always react with great enthusiasm when a young fly-tyer proudly shows me his or her vice. I just have to think back to when I was a young lad and how disappointingly uninterested some people were when I showed them my stuff – and I don't want to be like that. If somebody is very enthusiastic about their hobby, one should never dampen their spirits. My first vice was a vintage DH Thompson that I recently gave to a good friend in Malaysia who had just started

fly-tying. This vice is over 40 years old and still working! In Canada I store two boxes of similar-looking Pro AA vices that I use for my kids' classes, which Fly-Rite sponsored for me. These are perfect for kids or beginners to discover the art of fly-tying.

I acquired my second vice sometime in the 1980s, and it was a secondhand Dyna-King. It was good, but I didn't use it for long and actually swapped it for a brand-new Regal when I was in the US tying some flies at the Fly Tying Symposium in New Jersey in the '80s. I immediately fell in love with the Regal style of spring clamp and it became my favourite for a long time. In between I also tied with a few other vices, like the HMH, Renzetti, LAW, JVice, Thompson, PEAK, C&F, Wolff, Norvise and a few others whose names I have forgotten. Of all these vices the LAW and JVice impressed me the most. For many years, I had been using JVice creator Jay Smit's excellent tube fly attachment for tying my tube flies, which with a special adaptor, fits on my Regal vice stems (Jay made quite a few for Regal).

I was loyal to Regal for about 30 years, but also used the Frog from Magrini (Italy) for some time. The Frog is very similar to Regal and the quality is amazing – at some stage even better than Regal. Close to my retirement from the army, I promised myself that I was going to spend a lot of time fly-tying as soon as I'd finished with the army. I wanted to reward myself and buy a vice and stick to that till the day I die. I wanted a higher quality upgrade from my Regal and Frog – a vice fully adapted to my personal needs. It was an easy choice and today I can proudly say that my last and main vice is a JVice.

Although there have been some excellent reviews published about the JVice, I would like to share my personal impression of it, since it may be helpful to those who still have doubts about choosing a vice from what's available on the market today. Let me start with a little background about the originator, Jay Smit. I have known Jay since we first met in New Jersey somewhere in the early years of the new millennium. At that particular meeting, Jay told me his background and

"... AFTER LOTS OF RESEARCH AND MANY HOURS OF DRAWING SKETCHES, HE DISAPPEARED INTO HIS WORKSHOP AND CAME OUT WITH HIS FIRST JVICE PROTOTYPE."



Above: A Regal vice with a Gallows Tool attached to it.

Below left: Jay's midge jaw with adaptor for a Regal.

Below right: Tube fly attachment with adaptor to place on a Regal vice.

I swapped my special whip finisher and a bunch of flies for one of Jay's bobbins and hackle pliers. I got hooked on both of them and have been using them as indispensable instruments among my most favourite tying tools. Of course I tried Jay's vice too and I was highly impressed, but in those days my contacts with Regal were still very good, which meant that I didn't pursue the JVice at the time.

JAY SMIT AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE JVICE

Jay was born on a farm in the Howick area of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. With his dad as his mentor, he spent a lot of his early days in the farm workshop dismantling and repairing all things mechanical, ranging from water pumps to tractors. He later studied electronics and worked for Eskom (South Africa's electricity supplier) for 17 years before he moved to a manufacturing company in Durban. Here Jay modified and built custom machinery to enhance production, which led to his becoming the technical director of a group where he set up a small division that built specialised production machines. All the skills gleaned during this period were of enormous help to him when he later started making his vices.

The young Jay grew up fishing salt waters and somewhere in his 20s he discovered fly fishing and bought a 6-wt outfit. Sadly he didn't have much success and the rod and reel disappeared among the junk in his garage for quite some time. In 2001, he rediscovered fly fishing on a trip to the Drakensberg with his





Top: The author's JVice and tying tools in travel position and packaged in Jay's specially designed case in laptop format. Above: Enjoying the JVice's incredible rotary system.

friend Geoff Dettmer. After many hours practising and struggling on the water, he landed his first fish – a beautiful 1.5kg rainbow trout – on a Woolly Bugger. After catching a second fish just a few minutes later, that was it, he was hooked for life. One thing led to another, and he bought an entry-level rotary vice. Everything was wrong with the vice; it did not rotate smoothly and would not hold a hook properly. Jay got so frustrated that the vice quickly found its way into the dustbin. Fully convinced that he could produce something better, and after lots of research and many hours of drawing sketches, he disappeared into his workshop and came out with his first JVice prototype. It wasn't bad; it held a hook well and rotated smoothly.

A period of tying flies intensively and continuously making notes for several weeks followed, after which he disappeared into his workshop again to produce an upgraded version. It was better indeed, but still not fully satisfied he went through the same process again which led to a third version, producing even better results.

In October 2002, Jay went on an Ufudu Flyfishing Safaris trip to Mtentu Lodge with Ben Pretorius. Ben was highly impressed with Jay's vice and asked him to produce several for him to sell because he was looking for exclusive products manufactured in South Africa to add to his range of fishing gear. At that stage it took over 40 hours to hand-make a single vice and Jay was not immediately happy with the idea, thinking it would be far too expensive to produce. Ben persisted and continued nagging him until he eventually gave in. Jay had a friend who owned a CNC machine and together they made a few adjustments to the vice's design to make it more "machine friendly". Meanwhile Jay had to dig deep to raise the funds needed to order the first minimum batch of 50 sets of components. A few weeks later, he picked up the boxes of components and the first JVices were put together in November 2002. There were a few hiccups as the main stems were not to his liking and had to be remade to a new design.

Ben sold the first JVice in February 2003 to Dr Izak Bezuidenhout, a neurosurgeon from Pretoria, who'd attended one of Ben's Kosi Bay trips, and in the same month he sold two more. Things were suddenly looking up. By the end of that year, 37 of Jay's vices had been sold and the idea of selling them commercially became a reality – as did the prospect of recovering his original investment. At the end of 2003, the vice ended up in the hands of Hans Weilenmann and, as a fellow countryman, I know Hans very well. Hans is not only an excellent fly-tyer but also one of the world's most knowledgeable tyers when it comes to vices. While I published most of my work in the Netherlands, the UK and Scandinavia, he wrote articles and reviews for the *American Fly Fisherman* magazine. When Hans tells you a vice is good, you can count on it. He was impressed with the JVice and gave Jay a few pointers on how to improve on his vice even further. Hans's subsequent review together with some questionnaires would later help me make the decision to choose the JVice as my final one. Hans's review and other positive feedback from American anglers like Peter Frailey and Dean Childs and South African tyers like Ben Pretorius, Ed Herbst and Tom Sutcliffe were all responsible for the getting the JVice the international recognition it deserved.

THE CURRENT OFFERING

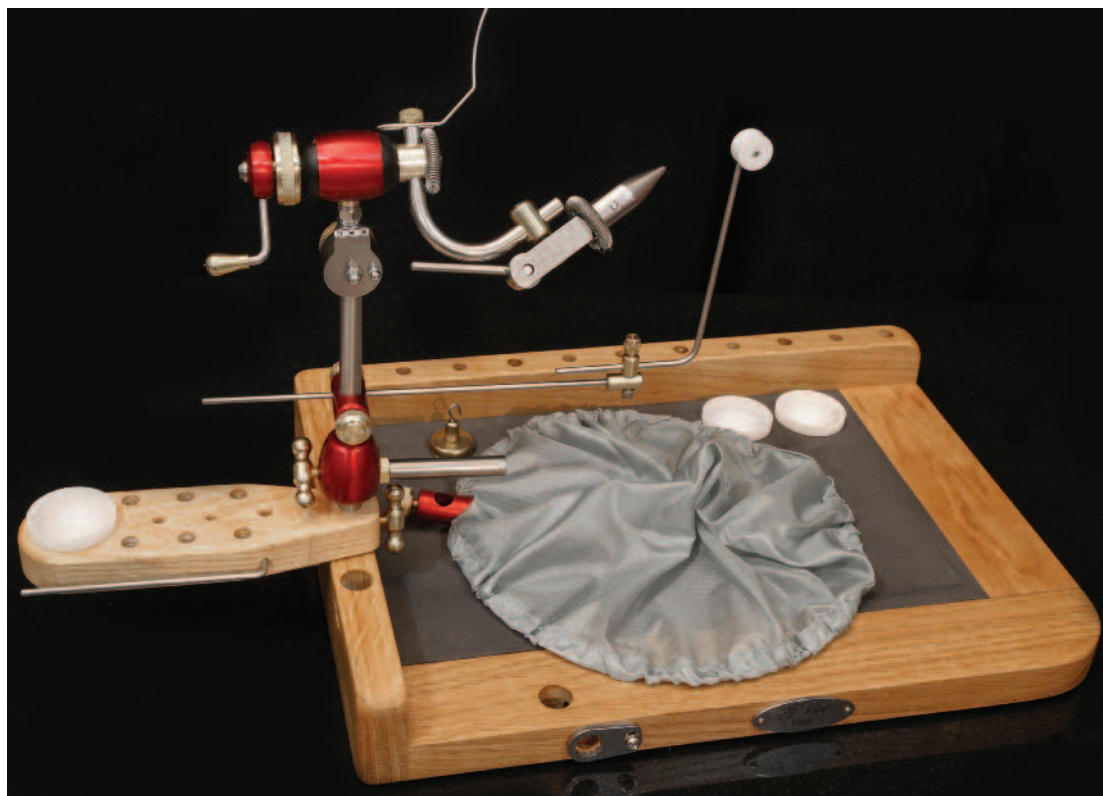
The JVice has undergone considerable evolution since Hans wrote his review. The gooseneck is now standard and gives considerably more hook height adjustment and hand access. The original double-action cam for clamping the hook has been replaced by a three-stage, uni-directional clamping action, upward towards the gooseneck. The rotating lever has been replaced with a crank handle on a 10mm stem. The JVice now uses solid brass for all the thumbscrews and adaptors, 316 stainless steel for the main shaft, and bar-stock aluminium for the main housing bushes and fittings (these are anodised silver as standard, with red, blue, green and black as options). The bushes, which act as clutch and brake mechanism in the main housing, are turned from Ertalyte. This is an extremely durable material used for bushes and bearings in heavy machine engineering and gives a smooth clutch action when setting the large thumbscrew.

About further improvements Jay has commented:

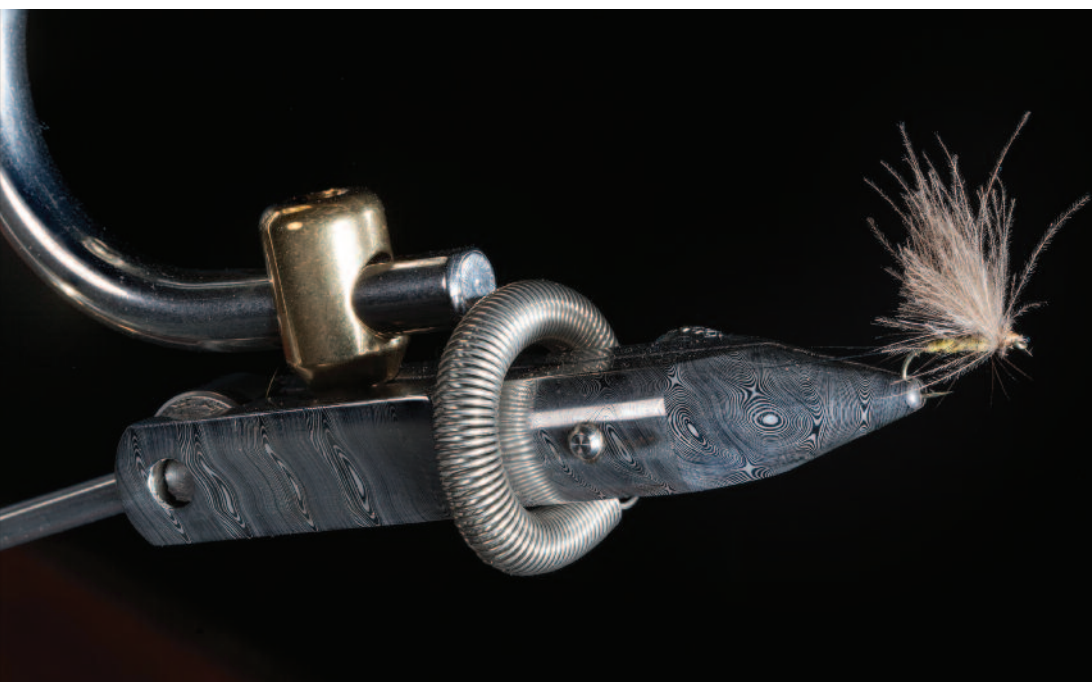
What the future holds I can't say for certain but development never stops. Responding to feedback from customers and interpreting their ideas has led to the development and manufacture of the attachment for tying Clousers, articulated bobbin holders and a backdrop card holder for photography, J-bobbin, hackle plier, on-base dubbing-brush maker, stand-alone long-fibre brush maker, bodkin dubbing spinner, mini deer hair stacker and a deer hair packer. The vice keeps evolving. The basics have remained, which makes upgrades, additions and customisation easy. At the moment, looking at what else is on the market, I think it is fair to say that there is no vice available that is as versatile and multifaceted as this one.

I fully agree with that because I have since spoken to many JVice owners who also agree. Several of them mentioned

“... JAY MADE UNIQUE ACCESSORIES ON SPECIAL REQUEST. THAT'S SOMETHING NOT MANY VICE MAKERS WILL DO.”



Above: This JVice setup has an extra tool caddy, Gallows Tool and bobbin rest.



Above: A beautiful pro-jaw made from stainless Damasteel from Sweden.

Below: An exclusive variation JVice setup with several accessories.

that Jay made unique accessories on special request. That's something not many vice makers will do. I know a few people who use Jay's midge head accessory with a special adaptor made for them by Jay to use exclusively on their Regals.

A PASSION FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

Jay's passion for and care about his clients is also evident in his service and sales. "A perfect service" is his slogan and he lives up to it. Important to know is the fact that the JVice is not available through shops because Jay prefers to interact with his customers himself. I can confirm this because we had extensive communication through WhatsApp before my JVice choice was put together and sent to me. Jay insists that only through good communication can he fully understand his clients' requirements and it allows him to ensure that each vice is set up perfectly for each individual.



How good Jay's administration is and how far his passion goes I witnessed when I tried to find the first owner of a particular JVice that was used in China. Within a few minutes Jay could tell me who owned the vice originally and I was able to tell him who had become the new owner as well. Each JVice base, goose-neck, brush maker and J-bobbin has a unique number.

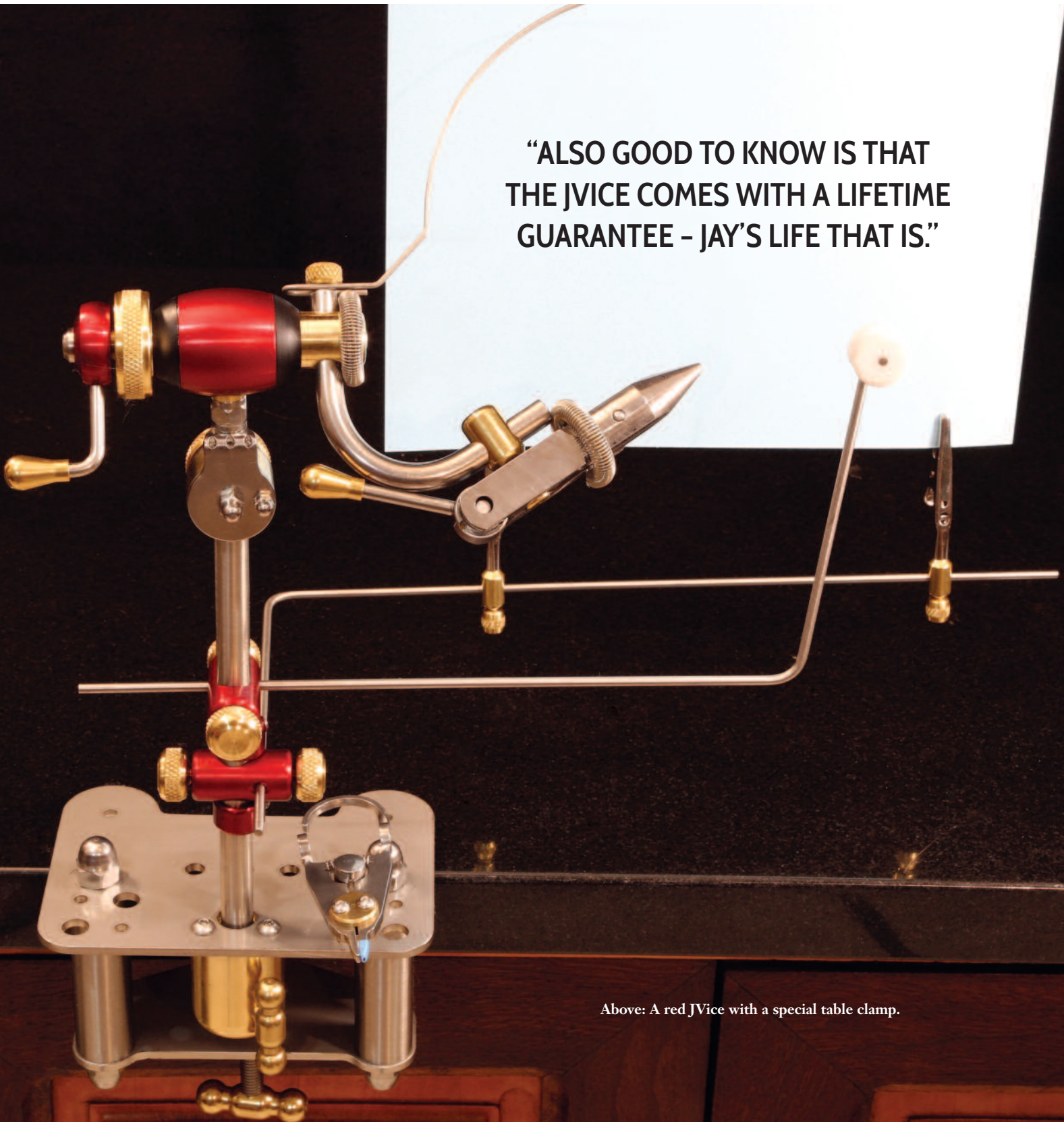
When asked about his exclusive base pack or workstation, as I call it, Jay says:

I found that most tables and surfaces at fishing lodges often weren't suitable to take a clamp and were often in an unsuitable location. The oak base is designed to allow laptop tying while sitting on a deck chair preferably with an ale or whiskey close at hand. I figured that if thousands of businessmen could tote laptop computers around the world, a laptop-sized base would work well and fit into a standard PC laptop bag. The problem was that laptop bags are pretty pricey and often cost as much or even

more than the vice, so I had to design a less expensive bag to keep everything together.

Jay designs the bases from solid wood and offers a lighter version with a wooden frame and special foam inside. Also good to know is that the JVice comes with a lifetime guarantee – Jay's life that is. But don't worry, the vice is so well made that the chance you will ever need his warranty service is slim and his vice really should last you a lifetime.

**"ALSO GOOD TO KNOW IS THAT
THE JVICE COMES WITH A LIFETIME
GUARANTEE – JAY'S LIFE THAT IS."**



Above: A red JVice with a special table clamp.



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Catching a large GT from shore along the African coast is no small feat. Catching it on fly makes it a fish of a lifetime. **RUDOLPH SCHEEPERS** tells the tale.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUDOLPH SCHEEPERS

HUNTING GTs FROM SHORE

Unexplored Waters

Recently, two avid fly fishermen, Glen Mathews and John Crabb, decided to do a trip up to Baboon Point Camp in Mozambique. I know the area well, and was honoured to guide them for the week. Baboon Point is a tented camp hidden between rolling white sand dunes and shaded by lush green trees, about 200m from the beach on the San Sebastian spit just south of the town of Vilankulo. From Vilankulo Airport it is a 100km drive on the main road to the turnoff that takes you to the last 60km of dirt road. The drive through the African bush is an adventure on its own, with some hardcore 4x4 sections that often require a winch to get through. The road eventually leads to Baboon Point Camp quite literally in the middle of nowhere. The total isolation of the camp makes it a very inviting prospect for any angler.

On the first day I spoke to Glen, he made it clear that his target species was a GT over 1m on fly from the beach – a fish he has been hunting for many years. Landing a GT that size off the beach on lure is a great achievement, so landing one on fly would be a life-changing experience. As experienced anglers we all know that conditions can be unfavourable for big GTs at times, so it's for those periods that the guys packed their 9- and 10-wt rods, with their 12-wts to be kept ready at all times in case a big GT came within range. John and Glen tied their own fly patterns, and spent many hours comparing patterns in the weeks leading up to the trip. Some of the GT flies that work well in the area are NYAPs and various versions of surface poppers, Brush Flies and Sempers, depending on the situation.



Above: Fighting a greenspot kingfish from the reef. Below: Baboon Point Camp.

“... HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS TARGET SPECIES WAS A GT OVER 1M ON FLY FROM THE BEACH – A FISH HE HAS BEEN HUNTING FOR MANY YEARS.”



After arriving at the lodge on Saturday evening just before dark, we enjoyed a sumptuous meal prepared by the camp chef. After supper we had a session of getting tackle sorted over a few cold beers; comparing flies and gear and fishing stories were shared late into the evening. The next morning after breakfast we headed straight for the beach. One specific fly that we all liked a lot and that Glen had tied himself was already proudly hanging on the end of the leader of his 12-wt outfit. It was a beautiful morning and the sea had settled to a small swell having been rather big for the preceding two days. With it being spring tide and with almost no wind, conditions looked great.

John grabbed me by the shoulder and shouted, “GT!” We both fixed our gaze on the reef where it ends and joins the white coral sand and noticed two monster GTs patrolling approximately 10m from the shore break. Gear was flung onto the beach and both John and Glen stood ready with their 12-wts locked and loaded. Tim Doherty, who had joined us on the walk, stood in disbelief as he followed the two huge fish slowly patrolling the section of reef. John, always the true gentleman, stood back and indicated for Glen to have the first opportunity at the fish. Glen and I quickly positioned ourselves at the water’s edge, trying not to be noisy or get noticed.

Below left: Glen making the 12-wt work hard as he fights the big GT. Below right: The fly that hooked the big one.



The water was crystal clear, making it perfect for spotting fish a way off. A big part of fly fishing off the beach is the ability to see fish in the water. All three of us are good at spotting fish and if one presented itself close enough we would certainly see it. The section of water we decided to work was a 5km protected bay just north of the camp. The area consisted of shallow ledges and scattered reef with sand patches between. At low tide, the water can become flat and clear and often the big GTs patrol the reefs close to shore for baitfish. That was what we were looking for during this session.

During the first few hours, we noticed some greenspot and bluefin kingies on the shallow reefs that were within casting range. One big GT showed itself on a swell 100m out but disappeared soon after. Glen and John decided to warm up on a few smaller fish while waiting for the start of the push. They grabbed the 10-wts and it was not long before they managed to land a few nice greenspot kingies. John also landed some small bluefin. After the warm-up session, we continued our hunt for a big GT. We walked past a section of scattered reef that tapered down into the sand on the southern end.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

One of the fish was quite dark in colour and the other a silvery white. I told Glen to target the darker fish as in my experience these fish are the more eager to feed. Glen aimed to place the fly about a metre in front of the fish, but with all the excitement and adrenaline pumping, his first cast landed about 2m off. As he grabbed the line and started stripping back, the fish turned and charged towards the fly, unfortunately missing it as Glen pulled it out of the zone. I looked back and saw John and Tim standing with their hands on their heads as they thought Glen might have missed his only opportunity.

While scanning the water looking for the fish again, Glen composed himself and prepared for the next cast. We spotted the dark fish frantically swimming around looking for the bait it had just missed. Glen’s next cast was spot on. I told him to pop his fly, wait a second and then start stripping. He did exactly that. His fly made a good splash and popped on the water, and, as he twitched the fly, the GT immediately noticed it. As he started stripping, a giant mouth opened and engulfed the fly, the fish turned, and Glen gave two solid jerks to set the hook.

**“AS HE STARTED
STRIPPING, A GIANT
MOUTH OPENED AND
ENGULFED THE FLY,
THE FISH TURNED,
AND GLEN GAVE TWO
SOLID JERKS TO SET
THE HOOK.”**





Previous page and above: Glen Mathews with his prize – a 114cm GT fly-caught from the surf zone.

It was almost as if Glen and the fish had made eye contact. With the fish now broadside to us and Glen holding his fly line at maximum pressure, not one of them moved for what felt like an eternity.

The next moment all hell broke loose. Glen took a few steps back and the fish started running towards the reef while Glen was frantically clearing his line. With the fish running along the beach on top of the reef, Glen tried his best to hold the beast. He quickly realised this was an impossible task, so he loosened his drag slightly and allowed the fish to run over the reef and head out to the deep over the sand. The fish took about 150m of line until it reached a shallow sandbank towards the back-line. Glen tightened up his drag once again, playing the fish there for a good 15 minutes. We noticed the fish getting tired as Glen was putting maximum pressure on it, resulting in it turning its head towards the shore. We knew that the fish still had to come back over the sharp reef, which was going to make or break this fight. If the GT decided to dive into the reef, the chances of losing it were high. Glen put a lot of pressure on the fish while walking back, carefully working it over the reef and using the swell for assistance.

Once in the shore zone, the fish made a few last darts towards the reef, but it was exhausted, making it easy for Glen to manipulate it. A few heart-stopping moments later, John and I had our hands on the fish, picked it up and placed it in a pool behind us. Glen was still about 30m up the beach: “Is it over a metre?” “Way over a metre!” John replied. Glen was shaking as he dropped to his knees, giving one huge fist pump. After an exchange of hugs, high fives and cries of joy, we measured the fish at 114cm fork length. After a few quick photos, we safely released the beast back into the ocean and stood in awe for a while – absorbing the thrill we had just experienced.

That was Glen’s trip made, and for the entire next day he sat in the camp recalling that amazing moment while the rest of us went fishing. John had a brilliant opportunity at a 40kg-plus fish, which unfortunately decided to ignore his well-placed fly. We also landed some more greenspot and bluefin kingfish. On the last day we went out for some fly fishing off the boat. The guys hooked and landed good fish, with John having an exceptionally good day. At the end of the week, Baboon Point Camp lived up to its reputation as a destination where salt water fly fishing dreams come true.



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If there is a carbon-dioxide hell, that's probably where I'll be going after this trip. I have already covered three flights in order to get to the city of Saskatoon in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. Early tomorrow morning, another three flights await before I'm ready for the final leg of the journey: a flight that departs from the barren outpost of Stony Rapids in the northwestern corner of Saskatchewan, and one that involves an old de Havilland Turbo Otter hydroplane – a Canadian-manufactured plane that had its heyday in the post-World War II era. After two days of arduous travelling, the propeller-driven air freighter will touch down on Phelps Lake's vast surface and moor at Wolf Bay Lodge in the middle of the Canadian wilderness.

FLY FISHING FOR TROPHY PIKE Phelps Lake

The Canadian wilderness is a place where you can still experience untouched pike fishing – a unique and compelling escape for those who dream of catching a veritable trophy pike. **RASMUS OVESEN** investigates.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RASMUS OVESEN & ANDERS OVESEN



On our way, out of the dead airspace above Saskatchewan, I can see how we're slowly transcending the realm of civilisation and disappearing into what appears to be a massive void way beyond. Symmetrical and lush green pastures, neatly outlined by fences and bordering gravel roads, are gradually relieved by vast woodlands, the monotony of which is only broken sporadically by the flickering waters of ancient, glacial lakes and quietly meandering rivers. Once on the hydroplane with a course set for Phelps Lake, there is nothing but wilderness as far as the eye can see.



Above: Wolf Bay Lodge.

Left: Getting ready for some pike action!



THE PIKE HUNT IS ON!

Two hours later, Phelps Lake manifests itself below us, silently resting deep in the terrain with all its chaotic branches, shallow bays and jagged islands in stark contrast to the stoicism of its surface. It's an early summer's day in the middle of June. A high-pressure system has killed all winds and, when we finally land, it's like touching down on a big mirror. After saying hello to Wolf Bay Lodge owner Brent Osika who greets us at the landing bridge, things unfold quickly. My brother Anders and I have half a day's worth of fishing ahead of us and soon we find ourselves in a Linder skiff with Merasty B Jason, one of the experienced local guides. The skiff cuts across the flat water with surgical precision. It navigates at high speed through narrow passages, wide-open expanses and big bays. And, being surrounded by nothing but forest, I soon lose all sense of orientation and locality. It's an intoxicating feeling and it is further amplified when, after a 20-minute boat ride, we arrive at a big, shallow bay, the engine is cut and a deafening silence descends upon us.

The pike are still in the shallows. The spawning – and a long, ice-cold winter – is but a dimming memory and the fish are hungry. Now, as Jason explains, it's simply a matter of finding the fish. They tend to school up in the many bays; the shallow ones with dark, muddy bottoms where the water gets warmed by the sun and baitfish are fairly abundant.



**“THEY PROMPTLY REACT TO THE SIGHT OF OUR RABBIT
ZONKERS, HUNT THEM DOWN WITH GLUTTONOUS FEROCITY
AND OFTENTIMES INHALE THEM RIGHT ALONG THE
BOAT SIDE IN BIG, SPLASHY EXPLOSIONS OF WATER.”**





We still have no idea, however, that we'll be sight-fishing for them in less than half a metre of water, and, on several occasions, in and along flooded meadows. It doesn't take long before we find the first fish. They are hovering along shorelines or in places where cabbage beds have slowly started to seep from the silty lake floor. They're not downright easy to see, even though the water is surprisingly clear, but it's obvious that these fish are all small males. Despite the fact that they're looking rather apathetic, they are hungry and aggressive. They promptly react to the sight of our rabbit Zonkers, hunt them down with gluttonous ferocity and oftentimes inhale them right along the boat side in big, splashy explosions of water. It's been a while since my brother and I have fished for pike, but we're quickly reminded why we both love to target this lightning-quick predator. We haven't travelled this far, however, to fish for small pike and the guide is well aware of it. So, having rekindled our reflexes on a handful of smaller pike, we move on to another of the lake's countless bays.

LOOKING FOR THE BIG MAMMAS

Having reconnoitred an additional three bays, we finally make it to a small outpouching in the northern corner of the lake. The bay inside doesn't look like much at first. The entrance is so shallow that we need to use oars to get in and, at first glance across the dark, ochre-coloured water, there are no signs of pike. It isn't until we reach the far corner of the bay that I see the shadow of a big pike underneath two bowed, moss-clad pine trees inside a patch of flooded meadow grass. The fish isn't alone! Several skittish male pike, which by comparison look distinctly immature and juvenile, stick to the big female. With lightly trembling fins and an aggressive look on her face, she seems likely to at any given moment lunge a malicious attack on one of her suitors. That impression is further enhanced shortly after when I cast my light-grey rabbit-strip Zonker on the edge of the flooded grass. As the fly hits the water, the big pike is instantly on it, with several smaller pike dragging vigilantly behind.



I give the fly a bit of action, making it wind and twist pulsatingly below the surface. The pike instantly shoots forward, ploughing purposefully through the water. I set the hook so promptly that the cork handle squeaks, and I now feel the weight of the fish as it thrashes about, whirling up the muddy bottom and sending cascades of water metres high into the air. A hectic fight with several explosive runs ensues. The fish, however, is solidly hooked and eventually yields to the persistent pressure. It's bigger than first anticipated, and it is with much effort that I manage to lift it aboard the skiff. A quick measurement reveals a length of 125 well-proportioned

centimetres. My dream of catching a big wilderness pike has come true – and in a spectacularly visual way. We shoot a quick series of pictures in the shallow water along the bank and, as the fish thrusts itself free of my hand, I let out a sigh of relief. Mission accomplished!

Less than two hours later, we have caught an additional seven full-grown pike with three of them well in excess of 120cm; all of them sight-fished with thunderously brutal takes as a result in the shallow water along the shoreline. Furthermore, we have cast at a couple of fish in the vicinity of 135cm. Fish, that for whatever reason, just didn't respond to

our flies. As we wrap up and head back to the lodge, we're in a state of shock. Never before have we experienced such hectic pike fishing with so many big fish. But, as we're about to find out during the next five days, this is nothing out of the ordinary on Phelps Lake. During our stay here, we sight-fish another 200 pike with 40 of them well over one metre and several additional fish in the 110cm - 120cm span. Furthermore, we get to experience some cool dry fly and nymph fishing for trophy lake whitefish and, not least, some sweat-dripping streamer fishing for the feisty lake char that school up along Phelps Lake's drop-offs. But that's a completely different story of course.

“MY DREAM OF CATCHING A BIG WILDERNESS PIKE HAS COME TRUE – AND IN A SPECTACULARLY VISUAL WAY.”



The impression I take with me from the lake is decidedly unambiguous. It may be madness to travel way beyond the outskirts of civilisation to the middle of the vast Canadian wilderness in search of pike. But it's most certainly an experience I would never have been without, and one that I'd readily recommend to anyone who has a propensity for big toothy predators in untouched surroundings.

FACT FILE – PHELPS LAKE

Phelps Lake is a massive lake in the northeastern corner of the Canadian province Saskatchewan. It's a glacial lake with a surface area of about 130km², and with the exception of a few areas with up to 30m of depth, it is an incredibly shallow lake – something that makes it an ideal habitat for pike. With more than 300 islands, countless reefs, backwaters, bays and tributaries with clear water, you

couldn't possibly charter all the good fishing spots in a full week. And since there are an additional 60km² of prime fishing waters to be reached on foot or via channels and tributaries, you could argue that Phelps Lake represents a whole fishing area, rather than just a single body of water. The season stretches from the middle of June until the end of August, at which point winter is already looming. At the beginning of the season you can



**“IT MAY BE MADNESS TO TRAVEL WAY BEYOND THE OUTSKIRTS
OF CIVILISATION TO THE MIDDLE OF THE VAST CANADIAN WILDERNESS
IN SEARCH OF PIKE. BUT IT’S MOST CERTAINLY AN EXPERIENCE
I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WITHOUT...”**

experience some incredibly exciting sight-fishing for pike. At this time of year, these fish will have just finished spawning in the myriad shallow bays and flooded meadows around the lake, and they will be both hungry and aggressive. During the summer months and onwards till the end of the season the fishing is typically translocated to the many drop-offs, reefs and islands where lily pads and cabbage beds rise from the bottom. Catches in excess of 50 1m-plus pike per boat per week are not uncommon, and every year several specimens larger than 130cm are caught. The lodge record is closer to 150cm.



FACT FILE – WOLF BAY LODGE

Wolf Bay Lodge is the only lodge with a licence to guide and fish on Phelps Lake, and since the lake is extremely secluded (the only way to get there is by hydroplane), the fishing pressure is minimal. The lodge, which has been in operation since the early '90s, has an authentic wilderness feel and is rather rudimentary without compromising comfort. In total, there's room for six fishermen, and they all fish from Linder skiffs with big casting platforms in front. For more info, check out www.monsterpike.ca. A regional Saskatchewan fishing licence is mandatory and can be bought online from www.saskatchewanlicences.active.com/purchaseprivilege.page. For info about the fishing in Saskatchewan and other interesting wilderness activities, visit www.tourismsaskatchewan.com.

In addition to the spectacular pike fishing it is also possible to catch trophy whitefish and giant lake char (*Salvelinus namaycush*) on Phelps Lake. The latter can be found in tremendous numbers, especially at the south end of the lake where the depth drops to about 30m. At the beginning of the season, fast-sinking lines and weighted streamers are used to connect with them, but as summer progresses and the water heats up they rise towards the surface. Here they can be fished with floating and intermediate lines, and although the average size is relatively modest – around 2kg - 3kg – it's not uncommon to catch fish in the vicinity of 10kg. Although these fish are minimally targeted, specimens in excess of 20kg are caught every year and 30kg-plus fish are certainly around.

Other species such as whitefish (top) and lake char (above) can be targeted on Phelps Lake.



FACT FILE – EQUIPMENT

When fly fishing Phelps Lake for pike, 9' 9-wt and 10-wt rods paired with floating or intermediate WF lines are typically used. Lighter rods will also work since really big flies are rarely necessary. However, since there are great chances of hooking a real monster, 9-wt or 10-wt fly rods are preferred.



With regard to the flies, 15cm - 20cm rabbit-strip Zonkers in light colours work well, preferably with weed guards that allow you to fish them along the bottom or through weeds and lily pads. Furthermore, small imitations of the lake's small, silvery baitfish are effective, and the same goes for noisy poppers and Gurglers.

Be sure to take along a 9' 5-wt and a few dry flies and nymphs if you're interested in catching one of the many trophy whitefish in the lake. Otherwise, you need to bring an extra 10-wt or even a 12-wt rod, paired with a fast-sinking fly line. The massive lake char in Phelps Lake are no doubt worth your effort and time. The

flies used for them are somewhere between 20cm - 25cm in length, weighted and in bright colours that will attract attention even at the dimmest of depths.

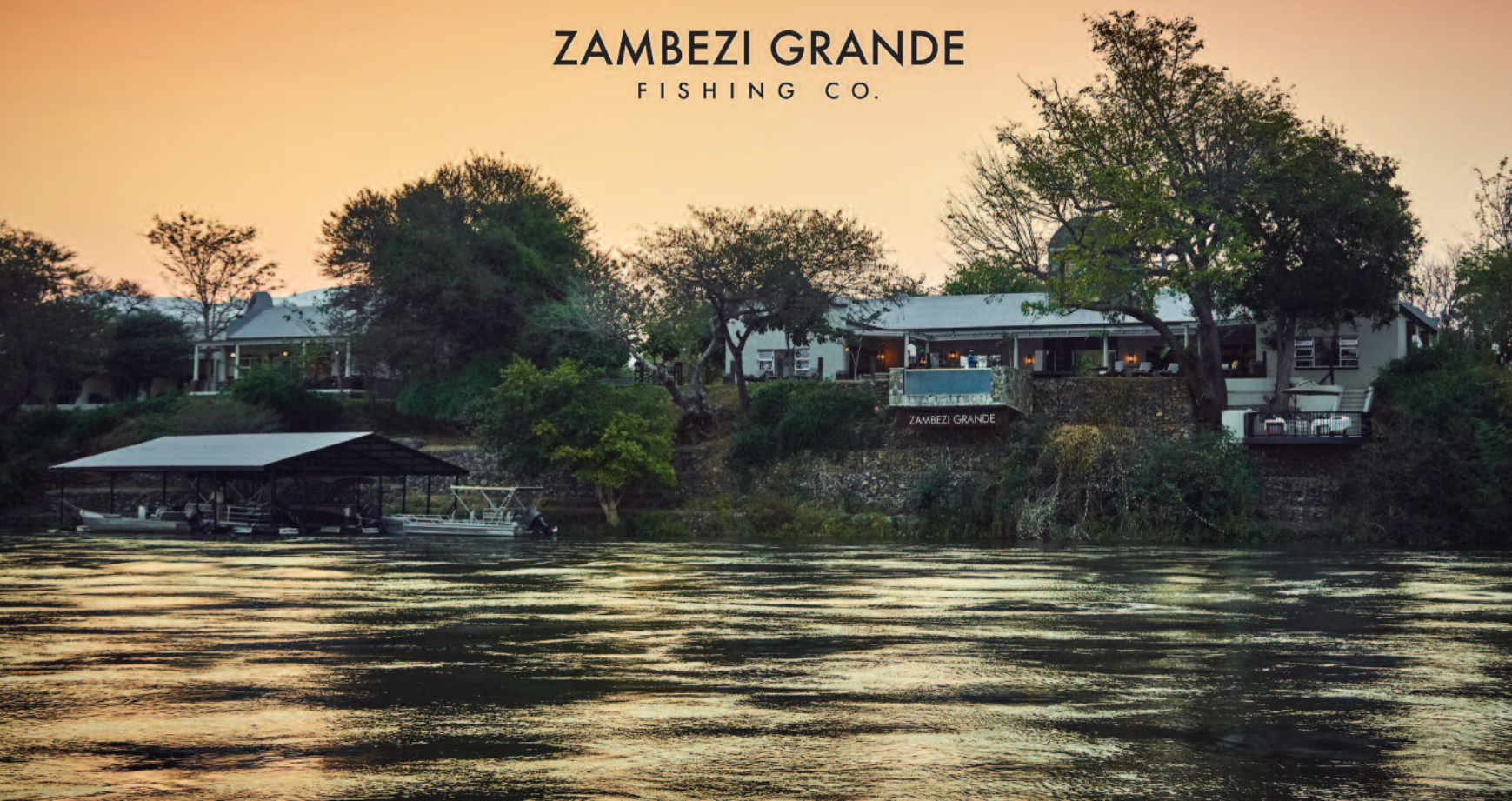
The fishing is done from the boat deck, but you might consider bringing a pair of waders if you're curious about the neighbouring waters, or if you like to get into the water for a few pictures with your trophy catch. Additionally, there are several clothing items that you need to consider bringing. The weather conditions at the lake are actually quite stable but make no mistake: things can change dramatically from one day to the next. You should therefore pack some wind- and rainproof shell outerwear that is capable of keeping you warm and dry. Also be sure to bring warm layering such as thermal wool tops and bottoms. Early in the season, temperatures typically don't exceed 15 - 20 degrees, but during the summer months it gets warmer. However, be prepared for cold weather, and don't forget that it can be particularly cold in the mornings.

Depending on the weather conditions, there can be a lot of mosquitoes and, as a result, it's a good idea to bring along a mosquito net and insect repellent. We had a great experience using a new series of BugStopper clothing from Simms; a highly technical type of impregnated clothing that effectively deters mosquitoes, gnats, ticks, horseflies and other bothersome insects. Don't forget sunscreen and a pair of good sunglasses as a defence against the sun and its reflections on the water. The latter serves an important additional purpose, of course. They are crucial when it comes to sight-fishing for pike in the shallow bays.





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Zambezi Grande

An extraordinary experience in wildest Africa – **TCFF** visits a five-star venue on the banks of the mighty middle Zambezi in search of tigerfish and a true African wildlife adventure.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PJ & LIZELLE JACOBS

A person wearing a grey cap and jacket, seen from behind, looking out over a river with a forested bank. The person is in the foreground, and the river flows towards the background where a dense line of trees is visible. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery.

The Zambezi is Africa's fourth-longest river, originating in the Ikelenge district in the North-Western Province of Zambia from where it majestically flows through six countries until it finally reaches the Indian Ocean, 2700km away. It is a mighty river in all respects, with some sections rated grade 5, the highest possible rating for white-water rafting, while other sections have milder rapids, strong currents, mysterious deep pools and shallow, inviting sandbanks, creating an environment conducive to hosting a myriad of both land and water animal species. Our focus for this assignment was the middle Zambezi, and, more specifically, the lower two-thirds of this part of the river. Here the river is essentially a tailwater, flowing between Kariba and Cahora Bassa dams, both huge and built for generating hydroelectric power for Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa. The roughly lower two-thirds of this section of river is flanked by national parks on both banks; the true left bank, the Lower Zambezi National Park in Zambia, and, on the right, Mana Pools National Park in Zimbabwe. With parks on both sides one would expect a lot of game to roam the banks and this is indeed the case, making this section of the river fascinating, wild and, of course, a little dangerous.



However, this is part and parcel of what one would expect when fishing for tigerfish in Africa, and, as you will learn later in this article, we were not disappointed. The parks are closed to netting or any kind of commercial fishing, so all things being equal, the tiger fishing in this section of river should be exactly what fly fishermen dream of – wild and virtually undisturbed.

Notwithstanding being battered by heavy winds, we experienced one of the smoothest landings we have ever had on our commercial flight into Lusaka. We

were, however, a little apprehensive as to whether our chartered flight to Zambezi Grande, our final destination, would be able to take off in the 30-knot (56km/h) wind that was blowing up sandstorms like a devil breathing down the runway. Luckily our pilot appeared unperturbed, and with a friendly smile even offered to fly a little higher than normal to help alleviate the bumpy ride that we were anticipating. Twenty minutes later, crossing the mountain range on the Zimbabwean side he banked the Baron light aircraft, giving us a clear view of the river below. Vast, wide and dotted with sand-



banks and islands covered in grass, I was not surprised that it looked low, given that the whole of the Zambezi was in the grip of a devastating drought. The pilot made landing on a tarred runway in a 30-knot wind seem easy, but from experience I knew it takes a lot of skill. We were in good spirits for the flight had been quite pleasant despite the high headwinds and turbulent conditions. The ten-minute drive to the lodge in an open Landcruiser was most enjoyable, and we kept an eye out for game.

CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE FIRST KIND

Arriving at the lodge we were serenaded by the staff in true African style and after a welcoming drink sat down to map out the assignment with Alexandra Jonker and Obert Lusinga, the marketing and lodge managers respectively. Enquiring about the wildlife, we were told that the previous day a roving elephant had wandered into the grounds to feed on the vegetation in front of the lodge. There are no fences and the lodge borders a national park. This was no tame elephant but a wild animal that had decided to come and snack on the green foliage of the lodge grounds. It seemed to be quite





a regular occurrence, according to the staff. We were informed that our suite (as do all the others) sported a hand-held siren that we could use if we ran into any wildlife that seemed to pose a threat, and that we would be escorted by the staff should we choose to venture outside our suite after dark. They would bring torches and presumably some kind of karma that would make us seem less appetising to the wild creatures that roam the night we joked, but being from Africa, we weren't really fazed, having seen and experienced plenty of wildlife, including elephants, back home.

However, a short while later we were suitably reminded that when you are in the bush in a remote part of Africa, encounters with wildlife are going to be more common (and hair-raising) than you might expect, for the elephant had returned and was now standing a mere 10m away from where we were, eyeing us while wrapping his trunk around some juicy leaves growing on a young tree. After assessing us for a few minutes – while we stood dead still partly out of respect and partly because we were more than just a little awed – he decided we were no threat, turned his massive back

and casually wandered up to our suite where he proceeded to rearrange the foliage in front of our porch in search of more food. Here he stayed for a good while, so we retreated to the bar for a drink or two to bolster courage and laugh about how relaxed the whole experience was. We've seen plenty of elephants before but never one this close up – a wonderful, if sobering, experience. After a great meal and some hearty chatter with our hosts and other guests, we retired to our suite accompanied by staff and found that the elephant had sought other pastures. A full moon had risen, casting a ghostly, silvery sheen on the now-quiet

Zambezi, the silence broken sporadically by the rumbling, hypnotic snorting of hippos. Ah, the mighty Zambezi! How can you not love Africa?

THE FIRST DAY

Next morning, bright and early, saw us and our guide Given in a very comfortable tinny of around 22ft, its 150hp outboard slicing us through a quiet and composed Zambezi, heading south down into the national park. A short while later we stopped next to a bank, tied up and waited for Given to complete the paperwork for us to be able to enter the park. With the requisite documents completed,





we proceeded on our journey deeper into the park. I'd not been able to check the weather conditions for the day and became worried when the wind picked up suddenly. Soon it was blowing at 50km/h-plus, making the setting up of good drifts almost impossible. Nevertheless, we persisted but were rewarded with only small fish, which did not seem to mind the constant on-and-off switching of the outboard, necessary because of the wind to try to keep the boat in the drift. Conditions worsened as the day progressed and late afternoon had us heading back, pretty much fished out and blown mindless by the wind that kept roaring relentlessly upstream. "You pay your money, you take your chances,"

Lefty Kreh once famously said of the weather when you go fishing, this being the only comfort we had, given our high expectations.

FISH AND GAME DRIVE ANYONE?

One thing that did not disappoint was the game we came across on our journey downstream. Elephants were everywhere; at one point we beached under a shady tree for a spot of lunch with elephants quietly feeding both upstream and downstream within a hundred yards away. When my wife asked our guide if they would come our way, he just smiled and said not to worry, we won't be in danger. Not five minutes later, a massive bull appeared right on the bank above

us, looking curiously at the boat and its occupants a couple of feet below. Hard as he tried waving his trunk around, he could not smell us because of the wind and after flapping his huge ears a couple of times to remind us who is really king of the jungle, he wandered back into the bush. Leave them alone and they won't harm you seemed to be the prevailing wisdom, so we kept our distance and enjoyed some of the most spectacular elephant sightings one could imagine. That's hard to beat, and after a couple of hours on the water, we had added buffalo, zebra, waterbuck, bushbuck and other species to the list which just seemed to grow as the day progressed. It was like doing a game drive while simultaneously fishing for tigers – insane!

THEN, THE CREATURES OF THE WATER

Of course, we saw crocodiles too. Plenty of them. Big and small, but mostly big. And hippos. Man, I've never seen so many hippos in my life! They were like fleas on a dog's back and, given the low water, reached places they do not normally hang out. We steered clear of them, which was more difficult than one would imagine but then, when I said they were plentiful, I really meant it. Thankfully, they were happy enough to leave us alone and, to be honest, so were we. I decided that a good name for this stretch of water would be hippo city, and/or maybe crocodile or even elephant city. With so much game around, it was evident that the environment was really healthy and that one could expect the same of the fish inhabiting the river. That evening I enquired about the fishing and specifi-



cally the size of fish one could expect in this part of the river, and, according to staff, double-figure fish were not uncommon, the lodge record being around 16lb. That's a big tigerfish I thought, so I rechecked all my line connections before going to bed, quietly vowing to take revenge on those elusive tigers the next day.

DAY TWO

Early morning the weather was calm as we headed upstream. It was Saturday, and apparently the sluice gates in Kariba had been closed, evidenced by the fact that the river had dropped quite considerably overnight. Earlier I had hooked a fish of around 5lb that managed to relieve itself of the hook close to the boat, but I was not too worried as conditions looked favourable, and there were a couple of smaller fish here and there. Around mid-day, I asked my wife Lizelle to take over and give me a bit of breather. Ten minutes later, she boated a feisty fish that ate the fly without hesitation (there is simply no justice). Back on the rod, I persisted with long, arrow casts right up to the bank as we drifted through one good-



looking spot after the other, expectations dwindling as time was running out like sand in an hourglass. Hours later and still no fish, Lizelle had a look at the barometer and was shocked to learn that we had experienced a 7-millibar drop in pressure over the last six hours. This and

a fast-dropping river had given the fish lockjaw, so I called it a day at around 5.30pm. We reluctantly headed home with the setting sun a smouldering red ball hovering over the horizon, the air still thick with dust after the previous day's heavy blow.



THE FISHING



SCAN ME

- Rods: 8-wt and 9-wt
- Reels: Smooth drag, 150 yards backing capacity
- Leader: 7', 30lb butt section, 15lb or 20lb class tippet, piano wire for trace
- Lines: Sinking lines and shooting heads in Di7 and slower sink rates
- Flies: Brush Flies, Clousers, and other baitfish patterns
- Other: Stripping basket, BogaGrip, pliers

“... DOUBLE-FIGURE FISH WERE NOT UNCOMMON,
THE LODGE RECORD BEING AROUND 16LB.”

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

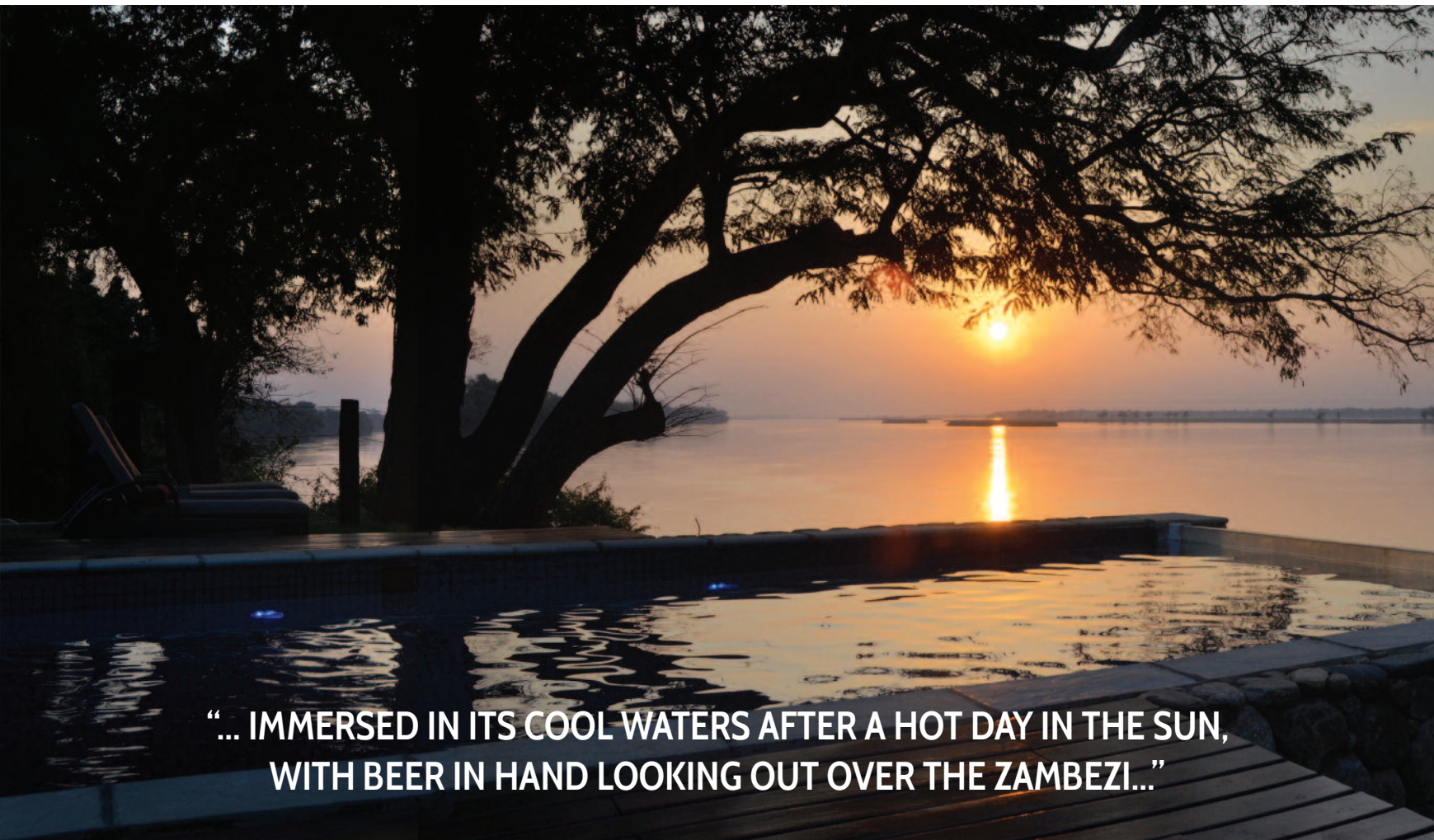
To say we were a little bushed after two hard days on the river with little to show for our efforts won't be an understatement, so when Alex told us that we were being taken to a "local restaurant" for a treat, I was, to be honest, a little disappointed. Firstly, I was tired and looking forward to an early bed and secondly, the food at the lodge was so good I could hardly imagine a local cook being able to offer something better. Grabbing something warm, we climbed aboard the Landcruiser and were soon into the dark bush, brandishing a spotlight that probed the darkness like the finger of some deity in search of wildlife. Before long we spotted a hyena strolling purposefully into the night, a rather rare sighting which had me feeling a bit more upbeat. A little while later we rolled to a stop under a cloudless, wind-free starry African sky. There was only a slight chill to the air and a cosy bonfire beckoned as we disembarked. Much to our surprise, we were greeted by all the lodge staff, including the chef. To one side stood a table dressed as smart as one would find in any

upmarket restaurant with our buffet meal for the evening. Next to this, another table complete with bartender, the go-to watering hole for the night. A number of inviting chairs surrounded the fire and in the nearby blackness flickered a light signalling the spot you needed to visit should nature call, escorted if required.

We were delighted and I settled for a Johnnie Black on ice as we were, once again, treated to the staff bursting into song, welcoming us to the evening. This soon resulted in an impromptu dancing session involving all, and we had a blast stomping dust to African song and drums. We were also treated to some dance moves that had us in stitches, all of this somewhere in the middle of the wild African bush. The food, when we at last breathlessly sat down to eat, was superb. I honestly cannot remember when last I enjoyed an evening out so much and glancing over to my lovely wife, I could see her echoing my sentiments. That night we both slept like babies, and despite the lack of fish and the hard work, we were thoroughly enjoying our stay.

EVALUATING THE FISHERY

While we have extensive experience in fishing the upper Zambezi, this section of the middle Zambezi is relatively unknown as far as fly fishing is concerned, especially in such close proximity to a national park. What piques one's interest in this section of the river, is that it is totally different, both in character and surrounds. While the upper Zambezi landscape for the most part is flat, this section is flanked by a mountain range which, although not huge, is impressive nonetheless. The river itself from bank to bank is large with many small islands, sandbars and other good spots where currents can congregate and create ambush spots for big tigers. There is also markedly less traffic on the river and during our visit we saw few other sport fishermen. Mokoros were noticeably absent and even upstream of the park we found no evidence of netting. Our guide informed us that netting is practised upstream of the lodge around some fishing villages, but during our visit we found no evidence of this at all, so the impact must be low.



**“... IMMERSSED IN ITS COOL WATERS AFTER A HOT DAY IN THE SUN,
WITH BEER IN HAND LOOKING OUT OVER THE ZAMBEZI...”**



One of the biggest attractions, aside from the fishing, is of course the abundance of game in the area and it is indeed possible to combine a serious game-viewing trip with fishing and do both at the same time. If you are more serious about only wanting to do one of these activities at a time, and perhaps a land-based game-viewing trip one day and fishing the next, there is that as well, although you will always see game when fishing. In our opinion, this venue ticks all the boxes for a true African adventure: fly fishing for tigerfish surrounded by game in wild Africa.

As far as being able to report back on the quality of the fishing, any assignment is always dependent on good or favourable weather conditions, one of the reasons why we try to do at least three days fishing at any venue. In this particular instance, we had two and a half days of fishing, and we were out on the water at 6am on our last morning with the wind already up. Given the drop in barometric pressure the previous day I was not surprised, in fact I was expecting the wind, and by 10am it was pumping well in excess of 50km/h, which killed any further fishing prospects. Our guide con-

firmed that the conditions were not the norm, but unfortunately you have to play the hand you are dealt, so we headed back to the lodge with the wind in our faces, creating waves on the Zambezi.

We had a particularly bad stint with the weather for the duration of trip, which precluded us from making a proper assessment of the fishery. That said, from the standpoint of what the likely prospects would be given reasonable conditions, I have to rely on feedback from various staff members at the lodge who all confirm double-figure fish readily being caught, and of course, my own fishing experience spanning several decades. Considering that this section of the Zambezi has little to no commercial fishing, especially in the area directly below the lodge (being the start of the national park where netting is not allowed), one would expect high fish populations. Lodge patrons have access to many, many kilometres where the river is in pristine condition. Numerous small islands, sandbars, solid banks and good vegetation all create conditions suitable for hosting large tigers, so there is every reason to have faith in the fact that those fish are there for the taking.



AN OVERVIEW OF ZAMBEZI GRANDE

Zambezi Grande is a new lodge, this being its second year of operation. The owners are passionate fishermen and the lodge caters to anglers of all disciplines, while making a particular effort to cater for fly fishermen. This is a high-class, five-star establishment, not only from an accommodation and activities standpoint but also in the manner that the staff goes out of their way to make your stay enjoyable. It's not a big lodge, and therein lies a lot of its charm.

ACCOMMODATION



SCAN ME

- The lodge offers five Superior Suites and five Luxury Rooms.
- The special four-night fishing package includes Luxury Room accommodation, all meals, standard stocked beverages, daily fishing excursions, as well as your flight between Lusaka and the lodge.



The staff know you by name and you very quickly feel welcome and at home. Accommodation is offered in five suites and five rooms; the suites are all situated on the riverbank with the rooms a few metres further back but still with a river view. A deck leads out from the main dining area which has an inviting pool that quite literally extends over the riverbank – a marvel of engineering and must have cost a packet to design and build. In summer I can imagine myself immersed in its cool waters after a hot day in the sun, with beer in hand looking out over the Zambezi and dreaming about the next day's fishing.

In line with its grading, the accommodation is luxurious, furnished in good taste, well appointed, very comfortable and roomy. One of the very few brick and mortar lodges we have come across on the Zambezi, the lodge gives the feel of a sprawling African homestead with colonial influence. Space constraints do not allow me to fully extort all the lodge's virtues, but I invite you to have a look at the video that accompanies this article, which will

give you a clear picture of what you can expect in this regard. Our three-course dinners each evening were fit for kings, and our meals and drinks on the boat (three cooler boxes, I kid you not) were enough to keep a whole rugby team well fed and hydrated. Obert has done a fantastic job with his staff, and a more amenable host will be hard to find. Our skipper and guide during our stay, Given, was not only highly skilled in driving and positioning the boat for good drifts, but he also understands a fly fisherman's needs. He is also most knowledgeable on the fauna and flora surrounding the riverine environment. Overall, a good man to have on your side.

Apart from the fishing, there are obviously game drives and other activities around game viewing on offer. The lodge's location makes it ideal for this type of activity with over 4000km² of national park on your doorstep with an abundance of game including the Big Five. A variety of boats are available for guests, including those suitable for fishing, as well as two luxurious cruisers, perfect for game viewing and/or sundowners on the river. And if staying at this lodge is not being spoilt enough, you could always make use of the wellness treatments offered by



Zambezi Grande. A good massage with the Zambezi flowing a mere couple of metres away will put anybody in a relaxed frame of mind, especially after a couple of hours on the water battling monster tigerfish. That, in essence, is part and parcel of why we seek out establishments such as these. And in that company, Zambezi Grande will be a hard act to follow.

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly to Lusaka on an SAA commercial flight. From there the lodge will transfer you via chartered plane (a 25-minute flight) and Landcruiser (ten-minute drive) to the lodge. For further info and to find out more about special packages for fly anglers, phone (031) 582-8315, e-mail: reservations@zambezigrande.com, or visit www.zambezigrande.com.



Marabou Trout Lodge

Mpumalanga's Sterkspruit has a reputation for trophy fish. **TCFF** investigates the rumours.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STACEY ISAACS



Only 7km outside the bustling town of Lydenburg, lies an untouched world in a valley which boasts one of the most beautiful rivers in Mpumalanga. The Sterkspruit River meanders its way through the valley, originating from the top sections of the catchment area in the Sterkspruit Nature Reserve bordering the well-known Marabou Trout Lodge. On assignment, this was to be our home for a few days and we were really looking forward to the experience. A two-and-a-half hour drive from Johannesburg saw us passing through Dullstroom and roughly 50km later we arrived in Lydenburg. The quick drive out of town put us at the Marabou Trout Lodge turnoff, and we were in awe of the towering mountains and glimpses of the river and fish eagles gliding in the thermals... aah, we were back in trout country!



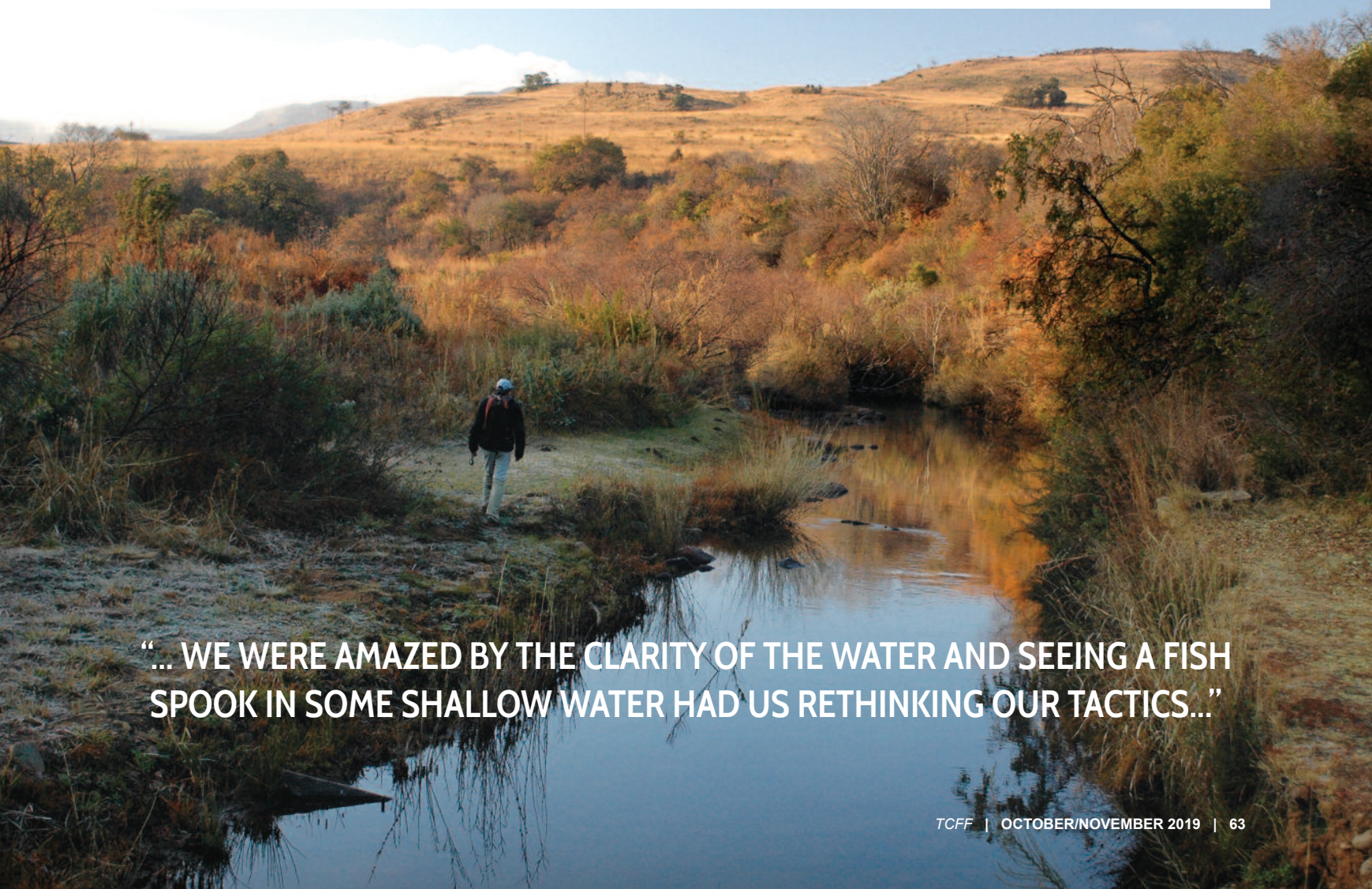
THE FISHING

Marabou Lodge boasts ± 2.5 km of the Sterkspruit River, which is one of the strongest-flowing perennial rivers on the escarpment. Natural pools and weirs on this freestone-type river offer trout fishing to naturally spawned rainbows, which are supplemented from time to time by fish from the farm's own hatchery. This means that there is always a chance of hooking a trophy, and to date the biggest

fish caught was just shy of 10lb. Looking through catch records confirmed that many other notable fish ranging between 6lb and 9lb have been taken in the river. As is the norm for rivers in most parts of our country, water levels drop during winter and the Sterkspruit was flowing at 40% of its normal rate during our stay. This, however, still provided plenty of flow – it's not called the Sterkspruit for nothing.

Walking along the banks, we were amazed by the clarity of the water and seeing a fish spook in some shallow water had us rethinking our tactics and switching to super-stealth mode. We came across a beautiful deep pool that tapered to a shallow tail-out and spotted two decent-sized fish holding exactly where any river trout should be. I was lucky enough to be the first to have a shot at them and as the small beaded nymph dropped below the surface, the fish's body language changed as it sped up to engulf the fly. A couple of casts later, my fishing partner Corrie was also rewarded with a good fish. We took numerous fish from pools as we meandered upriver, including some wild fish, and even my esteemed better half managed to bag a fine brace of rainbows.

Arriving at a nice-looking pool, I slowly peered in and automatically froze as a huge fish swam lazily about, unaware of our presence. Shaking with anticipation and wobbling at the knees, I hastily made a cast in the direction of the cruising fish. I gave a couple of strips and the fish immediately turned to chase down the fly. Missed! I pulled the fly right out of



“... WE WERE AMAZED BY THE CLARITY OF THE WATER AND SEEING A FISH SPOOK IN SOME SHALLOW WATER HAD US RETHINKING OUR TACTICS...”



the fish's mouth and berated myself, using some rather colourful language. I sent out another cast, only to have a small, wild fish shoot out of nowhere and take the fly. While we hastily netted the fish so as not to disturb the pool too much, I told Corrie to go ahead and have a shot. Well camouflaged among some grass and trees, Corrie crouched and made the cast. I could see the fly land ahead of the fish and start sinking. Thinking we must have spooked it, I was surprised to see the fish almost lazily swim up to the fly. At this point Corrie could not see the fish and had to rely on me to be his eyes at that moment. As the fly sank to the depth of the trout, it suddenly, with an aggressive flick of the tail, charged the fly down. "Yes!" I shouted and Corrie lifted into the fish, concentrating as hard as he could to gain control of the situation. After a few very tense moments, a magnificent trophy cock fish

came to net. A huge sigh of relief turned into absolute joy and happiness. A near double-figure trout is not something you experience in a South African river every day. Needless to say, my ghillie has definitely earned his stripes and has been promoted to assistant guide for future outings. That evening we celebrated with some well-deserved drinks and many recollections of how it all went down.

Further upriver there is a much wilder section with fast-flowing water, pockets and eddies – all suited perfectly for small-stream fly fishing. We walked and fished likely looking spots as we went, and missed a couple of wild fish that call this part of the river home. Lodge manager Paul van Vuuren says that this is his favourite piece of water to fish when the water is higher and where light rods and delicate dries are the name of the game.

TACKLE AND TACTICS

We fished predominantly 5-wt rods in the deeper pools as the size of the fish varied from smaller wild fish to bigger ones of 4lb to 5lb, not to mention the possibility of the odd lunger. We fished floating lines with 12ft - 16ft leaders and delicate presentations in the shallower runs. A 3-wt rod is perfectly suited for the faster, shallower runs and a dry fly can be fished with great success in these areas. We took numerous fish on CDC dries as a hatch of mayflies came off the river with the fish feeding on them with gusto. The deeper pools had us fishing heavier-weighted nymphs and streamers, and dead-drifting nymphs into a deep hole will have you at your wits' end as you wait for that lunger to come to the fly.

THE LODGE

Marabou Trout Lodge is a syndicated fly fishing venue, set on ±500ha along-



side the ever-flowing Sterkspruit. There is only one other farm between Marabou and the adjacent nature reserve, which adds to the general safety and exclusiveness of the farm. We were warmly greeted by Paul who has been at the lodge since 1994 and looks after the whole operation, including the fully functional onsite hatchery. Over and above, Betty, who has been with the company for ten

years, made sure we were comfortable, looking after the needs of all of the members from cooking to cleaning, and just being the all-round friendly face making your stay even more enjoyable. The lodge is set only a few metres from a beautiful pool filled with eager trout; a great place to wander down to in the late evening or early morning before breakfast if you can't wait to throw a line.

The lodge boasts four bedrooms, one of which has a double bed, and the balance two single beds in each room. There is also a loft bedroom that sleeps a further two people. An amazing fireplace separates the dining room from the lounge area and two separate fires can be made on either side for those cold winter evenings. The main fireplace was put to great use during our stay as a cold front set in and had us drawn towards the fire. The lodge features a fully stocked bar that contains all the hard tack, beers and wine you can think of. This may be utilised by guests, the bill needing to be settled at the end of your stay. There are three different braai options available outside, including a Weber for bigger family meals; however, no wood fires can be made outside due to the threat of fire and the thatched roof, so charcoal and briquettes are supplied for your stay. There are 16 shareholders that make up Marabou Trout Syndicate and each shareholder is allocated three six-night periods per year. Currently there are two shares available, so if you want to secure your piece in paradise on this basis, Paul will give you all the details.



THE FISHING



SCAN ME

- Rod: 8'6" 3-wt to 9' 5-wt
- Line: WF3F to WF5F
- 12ft - 16ft 5X leaders with 5X tippet
- Flies: Small mayfly nymphs, and dry flies such as hoppers, Elk Hair Caddis, RABs, Parachute Adams, Klinkhamers, etc.

**"A DOUBLE-FIGURE TROUT IS NOT SOMETHING YOU EXPERIENCE
IN A SOUTH AFRICAN RIVER EVERY DAY."**



ACCOMMODATION/ACTIVITIES

- Four en-suite bedrooms and a loft room
- Dining room, lounge, fully equipped kitchen for self-catering purposes
- Huge fireplace
- Fully stocked bar
- Three outside braais
- There are 16 syndicate slots; two are currently available. Each slot gives three six-night periods a year
- Two hiking trails, birding, mountain biking



SCAN ME



OTHER ACTIVITIES

The farm offers two walking trails, where you will be able to admire some of the 187 bird species that have already been ticked off on the property. Grey duiker welcomed us in the mornings as they fed on the lawn in front of the lodge while the baboons could be heard shouting in the crags of the mountains during the day. You may also get a glimpse of the elusive leopard and her cub that prowl the ridges and cliffs. A great way to learn more about trout rearing is by doing a tour of the hatchery where you will see the different cycles the fish pass through to provide a good supply of trout for stocking. Paul is highly knowledgeable and passionate about his fish and very willing to teach and to answer any questions you may have.



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THE MAGIC THREADS OF

SEMPERFLI

Success isn't something that simply comes your way. It is earned through putting in the long miles, learning hard lessons, and having the passion and persistence to succeed. TCFF's International Field Editor at Large **HANS VAN KLINKEN** puts the spotlight on one such company.

I met Ann and Andy Kitchener many years ago during one of the Spring Fly Fishing Shows in the UK which always got so well organised by Steve Thornton – a pity that show doesn't exist any more. During my breaks from giving demonstrations and classes, I like to walk around and meet up with old friends, make new ones and search for some new and interesting materials. At this particular show, Andy was presenting his range of Superfine Dubbing together with several other unique products he'd invented. I've been working with Fly-Rite's Extra Fine Poly Dubbing all my life, and, because I use it for the majority of my dry fly bodies, it always makes me

curious to compare my favourite product with other dubbing materials. The large amount of dubbing in Ann and Andy's booth intrigued me so much that I struck up a conversation with them and, after a lengthy discussion about dubbing properties, Andy showed me some of the other materials he had developed. It was the start of our amazing friendship.

Due to the pressures of my work we lost contact for a few years. However, once I retired in 2012, I was able to spend more time writing, fly fishing, tying flies and visiting more international fly fishing shows again. My two main goals of retirement were to write more, to promote fly

fishing, and to increase my fly fishing and fly-tying workshops with kids to try to keep them away from computers, Nintendo and PlayStations. Everything went smoothly for four years until my main sponsor for the kids' classes let me down. Although I funded a few classes from my own pocket and using my own materials, I sadly had to cancel all the other classes for the rest of the year. Barely two months later, I met up with Ann and Andy again while they were presenting some new materials in their Semperfli booth. Our friendship was quickly rekindled after a few meetings, and when I mentioned my dilemma with the sponsorship, Semperfli was happy to step in

with serious support as the main sponsor for my children's classes.

I have visited the company quite a few times over the years and I've seen Semperfli grow from a small family business to where it is today. I have been an ambassador for its products since 2015, and I know the company and the people behind it all well. In this article, I would like to give you an insider's view of these people behind the scenes, their passion for fly-tying and their magic materials.

It is a family run business, led by Ann and Andy, their daughter Sarah and partner Thibault Mallier. Each family member has a key role in the company, each running their own divisions.

Ann, as CEO, heads up the company while being responsible for international sales and marketing. I have never seen anybody answering e-mails and letters faster than Ann. Speaking several languages, she is fantastic with social media and recruits and looks after Semperfli's

dealers and distributors around the globe. She is passionate about customer care and is also a keen photographer.

Andy runs the research and development department and is the big innovator of the company, focussing on the continuous development of materials that could make a difference in the tying world. Initially he spent a great deal of time researching the global fly-tying market, where he found too many mediocre products or products that were not specifically designed for fly-tying. Andy is an amazing trouble-shooter. I have also never seen him angry, and he is a typical English gentleman – always in a good mood. He quietly listens to the tips, advice and comments from Semperfli's ambassadors and pro members to keep improving their products. It's not difficult to see that his work is his passion and his knowledge about fly-tying materials, technical background and computers is unreal. He invented his own spooling machines, secret dying techniques and other machinery and equipment needed for fast and reliable production. For example, when you dye your own products, there is nothing trickier than colour changes in the threads, chenilles and several other products in your assortment, and the more colours you dye, the greater the risks. Semperfli does all its own dying so the techniques are highly confidential.



Above: Semperfli has become the new sponsor for the author's kids' classes.

Right: The author with Ann, the CEO of Semperfli, testing products while fishing.

Main photo page left, from left to right: Team Semperfli's Andy, Ann and Sarah Kitchener, with Tibby Mallier far right.

A TRUE FAMILY BUSINESS

A lot of people may be aware of the Latin saying *semper fidelis* (always faithful) and the abbreviation *Semper Fi* is the motto of the US Marine Corps. Semperfli chose the name to reflect their dedication to fly-tying. Based in the beautiful county of Yorkshire in the north of the UK since 2010, Semperfli is a manufacturer of fly-tying materials with a drive to establish a quality and innovative range of tying materials that are completely focussed and tailored specifically for the fly-tying market. Semperfli was founded on four cornerstones: quality, innovation, passion and customer service.



Sarah manages the UK and Scandinavian markets specifically and she loves her travels to the Scandinavian countries. She also helps me with the materials for my kids' classes and workshops. Thibault Mallier, better known as Tibby, looks after production and logistics; the division that does the dying, spooling, packaging and more. He carefully oversees the products as they are made and dispatched, and having worked with him quite closely, I can vouch that his quality control is superb. Altogether there are 15 people who make the Semperfli magic happen and each person – whether they are running the high-quality spooling machines that turn out thousands of spools every day or packaging the products or picking and packing orders – genuinely has a passion for the products that Semperfli delivers.

By 2014, demand for Semperfli products was increasing. Ann focussed on recruiting partners based on their passion for fly-tying and the Semperfli range of materials – and they absolutely needed to understand and share the four corner-

stones of the brand. That effort has turned into a network of dedicated partners worldwide who sell the Semperfli range to fly-tyers today. These cover countries such as South Africa [Jandi Trading], USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK,

Ireland, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, France, Germany, Austria, Romania, Argentina, Finland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and China, to name a few.

Above: Ann with UK Semperfli ambassador Paul Procter. Below, from left to right: Max; Ben Walker (who is also part of the production team responsible for the spooling, carding and manufacturing processes) with Tibby; and Sarah concentrating hard at the vice.



LARGER SEMPERFLI NETWORK

Semperfli also has a large group of ambassadors and pro members across the globe who do a superb job of showcasing the materials. They form a very strong unit and work closely with the team at Semperfli headquarters, even to help decide on product developments and releases. Each year Semperfli hosts the Fly Jam event where all the ambassadors and pro team members come together either in person or via a massive online conference. During this event everyone reviews and decides together on the planned new products for the following year. It is a very serious happening that coincides with many other fun activities. It is the highlight of the pro team year and is unique in the fly-tying business globally.

Another group of professional tyers I know uses Nano Silk exclusively to tie their entire selection of commercial Predator flies. It is also ideal for large pike flies and big blue-water patterns. The white Nano is used in a lot of salt water patterns. I use the very thin 18/0 Nano in my classes for participants that can't handle threads like the fragile Spiderweb, which breaks constantly if you don't know how to use it. In my personal tying, I use Nano Silk mainly for specialised work such as bugs and bombers, mice patterns, certain poppers and big Predator or salt water flies. This is why I call it a technical thread as it suits specialised tying work. For all my other flies, I use polyester thread. Just as an aside, remember to only use a ceramic bobbin holder when working with Nano Silk.

use(d) a lot of peacock in my fly-tying, not just for the thousands of Klinkhamers I tie every year but also for many other patterns like those within my large Bondal series of Atlantic salmon flies and my Caseless Caddis series, so my search for the best substitute became a necessity. By developing Straggle String, Andy has produced an alternative to the peacock thorax on my Klinkhamers (Klinkhamer Special version 2.0).

PURE SILK THREADS

When just a few months later Andy's pure silk threads became available, I almost jumped table high. I used a lot of traditional silk from a private collection given to me in the early 1980s for special ribbing colouration and segmentation on my mayfly imitations and also for bodies



Above left: Nano Silk. Above right: Straggle String.

SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGHS

The product that catapulted Semperfli and took the fly-tying world by storm is its Nano Silk. It is a GSP type of thread that is virtually unbreakable and reported to be the strongest tying thread on the market (reference: *Fly Tyer* magazine and Global FlyFisher). Nano Silk gives the fly-tyer absolute confidence knowing their thread won't break. Not only do beginners love it, but also commercial and specialist tyers alike. A few close friends of mine exclusively use Nano to produce their bugs and bombers, which are immensely popular in Atlantic Canada. Nano works really well with deer hair and it's my favourite thread for my deer hair patterns.

WORKING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

With a very conscious and ethical view on the environment, Semperfli focusses its developments into offering a sustainable and responsible synthetic range. This is highly relevant as not all tyers are aware of how CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species affects them. Nowadays you risk having your favourite feathers and furs confiscated by customs, being fined, or even worse, if you travel internationally and are ignorant of the laws. For example, the wild green peafowl (*Pavo muticus*) is highly endangered and that's exactly the species we use the most feathers from. I

of my spiders, flymphs and small realistic nymphs. Sadly this thread became obsolete, which meant I couldn't use it in my publications, classes and workshops as I don't like to promote patterns using materials that are not readily available. I literally only had five spools left when Andy launched their new silk thread. It was almost 100% equal in quality to the classic silk I used for such a long time. Today I can once again use silk thread freely in my classes and workshops, thanks to Semperfli.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Andy has made enormous efforts on the second generation of Semperfli spools, the labelling and packaging. He



**“AND THERE IS NO STANDING STILL FOR
THIS COMPANY AS IT CONTINUES
TO INNOVATE AND BRINGS US FLY-TYERS
MORE AND MORE QUALITY MATERIALS
– ALL WE EVER DREAMT OF.”**

also developed completely new specialist clear dispensing boxes for the dealers to have in store – making it easy for spools to be displayed and accessed. Each spool of thread has a super-strong waterproof label on it, created with a ready-cut cross for the bobbin, and sold pre-barcoded, which makes everybody’s life a lot simpler.

There are so many Semperfli products I can write about, but with space constraints, I would like to highlight their most popular products. Together with ambassador Paul Procter from the UK and some members from the pro team, we tested a new product during the last few months of 2018 as if it was a top-secret army project. The subsequent launch of the Classic Waxed Thread in January 2019 really made a massive impact on the fly-tying market since a lot of customers wanted a high-quality thread that





Above left: Micro Glint. Above middle: Iridescent Thread. Above right: Flat Braid.

can be split if required, and came in many different colours and sizes. It needed to lie flat for better grip on the hook and it had to have just the right amount of wax. The response to the launch of the Classic Waxed Thread was phenomenal and exceeded all expectations. I've read a lot of the feedback and comments from fly-tyers around the globe, and I was overwhelmed by their positive responses. So much so, that Semperfli's forecast of waxed thread sales for the whole year was achieved in the first quarter!

Phase two of the Classic Waxed Thread range saw the addition of fluorescent colours, which was further welcomed. To meet this exponential growth, more spooling machinery was purchased. The new specialist equipment can even do touching turns when laying material, including wires on a spool down to a fraction of a millimetre. This means the fly-tyer gets the very best material with no "bird-nesting" or tangling of the thread as it comes off the spool. And there is no standing still for this company as it

continues to innovate and brings us fly-tyers more and more quality materials – all we ever dreamt of. An overview of all the Semperfli materials can be seen in the online catalogue, which is, in true Semperfli style, very innovative. Rather than just lists of products, it showcases the materials along with examples of what can be tied with those products. The catalogue includes tying videos and tips from the Semperfli pro team to inspire tyers everywhere. It can be viewed at <https://semperfli.us/2019catalog/>



Hook Selection

Are you selecting the right hook for the pattern you want to tie?

Contributor **ARNO LAUBSCHER** sheds some light on this often difficult choice.

Over the years, I've had some very interesting discussions and even requests with regards to hook development – most of these being about hook profiles and choosing the right hook for a certain pattern and its purpose. One request that has stood out was for a long-shank, wide-gape hook. First of all, I do not believe that there is such a thing. Some may disagree with me, but that depends on how you look at hooks in general, so allow me to explain.

There is an important relationship between the hook gape and the hook shank. These are always in proportion to one another within the range of sizes of a specific hook style, and together they play an important role in creating the hook profile. Let's take for instance the Grip 11001 hook style, which is a standard dry fly hook, with no extra-long or extra-short shank. If we extend the shank of this hook without changing the shape or size of the hook gape and bend, you will notice that the hook gape grows smaller in relation to the hook shank. If you shorten the shank you will notice that the hook gape grows larger in relation to the hook shank. Even though the gape size does not physically change, the hook profile changes.

This is very visible in the following straight-shank Grip Hook styles and applies to all straight-shank hooks:

1. Dry fly hooks (see below left)

If you take the same size in the following dry fly hooks, you will note that the longer the shank the smaller the gape appears even though the gapes are the same size:

- Grip 11001 – standard dry fly hook
- Grip 11501 – 2X long dry fly hook

2. Nymph hooks (see below middle)

The same applies to nymph hooks:

- Grip 12003 – standard nymph hook
- Grip 12004 – 1X long nymph hook

We often find ourselves in situations where we want to imitate a specific invertebrate but feel that the hook gape is too small, especially when tying nymphs. Let's say you want to tie a #14 mayfly nymph and normally tie them on a Grip 12004 #14 hook but find that the gape may be too small for its specific purpose, be it different species or conditions. The first thing you'll want to do is look for a different style hook with a wider gape. If we find a hook with a wider gape and look at the #14, we may find that the hook shank is now too short for the fly. We (and I include myself) often get stuck on the hook size for specific imitations

and this is when we find it difficult to find the right hook. We should instead use the hook size as a reference point only for the size of the fly but not necessarily use it for the pattern we want to tie.

So how do we solve this problem? It's actually quite easy. When you know what you want to tie and the size of it, search for the hook style that will give you enough gape for your purpose. Then find the hook size with the same shank length you need. It will typically be one or maybe two hook sizes larger than that which you would normally use. For example: if you tie mayfly nymphs on the Grip 12004 #12 and want to tie the same size fly on a hook with a larger gape, you can try tying it on the Grip 12003 #10. The 12004 hooks have the same shank length as that of the 12003 in one size larger hook number. The number on the packaging is meant to be a reference only, and my advice is to look at the actual size of your imitation.

It is also very important when we tie on curved shank hooks. When visualising the imitations one can tie on a specific hook, we often don't see the full potential of that hook. Take for example the Grip 14723BL. Look at the photograph of the two hooks on the facing page. They are

Below left: Dry fly hooks. Below middle: Nymph hooks. Below right: The Grip 12004 #12 (at the bottom) has the same shank length as the Grip 12003 #10 (at the top), which will give you the same size fly but the Grip 12003 #10 will have a larger gape.





Above: Grip 14723BL is much more versatile than most tyers think. This hook can be used for caddis larvae, caddis pupae, mayfly nymphs, emergers and the larger sizes can even be used for small minnows. It is also the preferred hook for Dr Hans van Zyl's famous Sterkfontein Dam beetles.

both Grip 14723BL #8, but they appear different because of the way we look at them. The hook on the left looks more like a curved-shank hook because it was placed in such a way that the point is in a horizontal position and the shank points down. The one on the right was placed with its shank in a horizontal position and so this hook appears to be more of a straight-shank hook with a wide gape and dropped point. Looking at these perspectives gives one the ability to see a hook's potential for different imitations.

Remember, start by identifying what you want to tie and the size you want to tie it in. Then look for the right hook and use the hook size reference on the packet as a guide only.



"Letters to the Editor" continued from page 6

bombs into head winds while wading chest-deep in the sub-zero climes of the TT and the Tongariro River. Good fish, amazing people and great memories. What struck me as odd was their disregard for the elite fly fishing brands that we in South Africa so endear. These are hard, simple men fishing in tough conditions with rather inexpensive fly rods, and they still get the job done. A very good friend of mine once received a Hardy Smuggler as a gift, but much preferred his trusty old river rod, great for mending, which I found out was essential in making sure your flies spend as much time as possible in the feeding zone. Horses for courses, I guess. The Smuggler, after all, was a piece of art, a prized possession. Since my return to the motherland five years ago, I've had to make a few adjustments. I've come to re-appreciate the effortless joy of casting unweighted flies on much lighter rods. On a recent visit to Dullstroom I saw the latest and greatest in fly rods – fibreglass, and at a premium! How things have changed. Fortunately, technology has improved so much in terms of rod building, coupled with the low cost of decent graphite that it is now much easier for youngsters to get their hands on a good fly rod without having to rob a bank. A big shout-out to the likes of Xplorer, Horizon and Stealth. While paging through your magazine every month, I often think back to a time when we made our own tapered leaders, a time when petrol was two bucks a litre, a time when magazine editors still sported black beards... and I smile. I am

blessed, humbled and very grateful to count myself among you gentlemen and ladies. Thank you for the memories. Wimpie Oosthuizen.

The trip of milestone fish

I think everybody remembers their first time catching a milestone fish. In some way it is like remembering your first love. For me this milestone was catching my first trout on fly. My first rainbow trout ever was probably one of the smallest in the lake, but I have always dreamt about catching a trout on fly and this was my moment, the size of the fish was beside the point. Nothing could compare to the feeling of accomplishment, my whole trip was made in that moment and I thought nothing could make me happier. I was completely wrong. The Matatiele Mountain Lake is an unforgiving place in winter, reaching well below zero through the night and early mornings. The journey there is quite a daunting one; in some parts we needed a four-wheel drive to get past obstacles. We drove up just before dawn, climbing to roughly 1850m above sea level. It was windy, freezing cold and just miserable when we got to the lake. Conditions did not look perfect, but we had a mission. The mood, however, soon changed as my friend landed the first rainbow trout of the trip. Morale was high as we waited in anticipation. Movement in my strike indicator made my heart miss a beat, and I set the hook perfectly to my first-ever trout. From there on I was completely hooked to the feeling. We spent the rest of the day catching a few

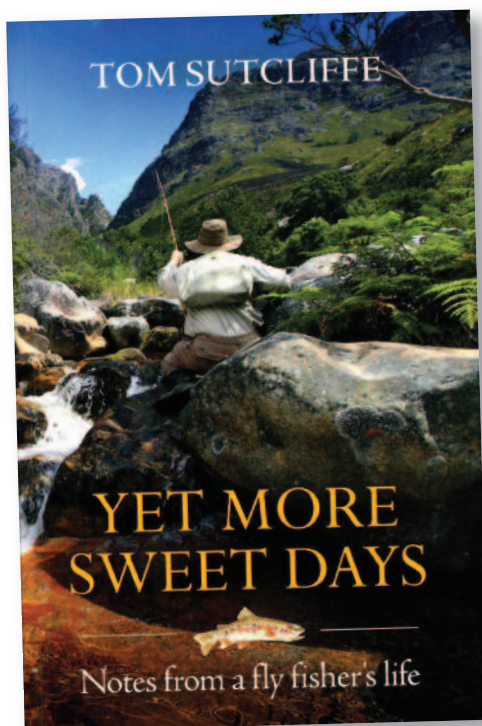


more decent fish with my biggest one estimated at just over 3kg. Beginner's luck, I assume. The next morning it was the same routine, up before 5am and a journey to the lake. I was not prepared for what would happen on my very first cast. My strike indicator went down and I set the hook to a monster. What felt like an eternity, later, the fish came to the surface and its golden-brown body shimmered in the early morning sun. It must have taken 15 minutes before I got this big brown trout into the net. The fish, taking an egg pattern, was barely hooked in the corner of its mouth. Thinking back to that moment, everything seems to be in a bit of a daze. After releasing it back into the water I stood in awe of what had just happened. The image of the fish disappearing into the depths of the lake is what hooked me forever. Thank you TCFF for always fuelling my passion for fly fishing and adventure in general. Your magazine keeps my wildest dreams alive. Benno Klinck.



Yet More Sweet Days

NOTES FROM A FLY-FISHER'S LIFE



Author: Tom Sutcliffe
Published by: Mercury, an imprint of Burnet Media, 2019
ISBN: 9781928230717
Format: Softcover, 472 pages, with black and white sketches by the author throughout, 150mm x 228mm
Available from: Directly through the author, sutcliffe@mweb.co.za
Retail price: R320 (excluding shipping)

even smelt the way a good or important book does, an odour difficult to describe but one that will always stay with me, courtesy of spending a lot of time in the cellar of the Palace of Justice browsing through old records and statutes as a young lawyer. At around nearly 500 pages, *Yet More Sweet Days* promised a good read and I was already well into it, but in no rush. Good things must be savoured.

If there is anything that can lift my mood in a short space of time, it's either fishing, tying flies or reading about both. Fly fishing literature is vast and has produced many exceptional writers and what I find particularly pleasing is when a writer has the ability to make you feel you are there right next to him as he lays down his prose. This kind of author is spread a little thin even among the luminaries that fly fishing has produced, but to carry the point, a guy like Thomas McGuane comes to mind as does John Gierach to name just two, and then, of

course, there's Tom Sutcliffe. There are others that find themselves in this exalted company so forgive me if your favourite is not listed here, but to the point is the fact that these gentlemen all have the ability to make you pick up a rod, wave it around a bit just to get the feel, haul out a few fly boxes and decide that you need to tie up some flies, check the calendar for when you can steal some time to get away to go fishing, and generally just wanting to do something fly fishing related. And this, almost directly after you put the book down, which, to me, is the ultimate test of a good fly fishing author.

Yet More Sweet Days – Notes from a Fly-fisher's Life is exactly what it purports to be: an introspective look into the author's life as a fly fisherman and his interaction with nature – its rivers, fish and the people he has met along the way. It's not a how-to book on fly fishing, although there are some chapters like *Small Streams* and *Trout Flies* that carry good advice (if not pearls of wisdom) as

A Tuesday morning found me sitting on the wooden steps of the porch that leads to what I now sometimes use as my office. Inside it was cold, not quite enough to wear a jersey or pullover, just a tad too much to be comfortable. I was about to do something I love and wanted a bit more comfort, so I took a couple of old cushions from the iron bench on the porch and tried to make the stairs a bit more user-friendly. The late winter sun was pleasantly warm, with hardly a breath of wind, and I settled down to fish between the pages of Tom Sutcliffe's latest book, *Yet More Sweet Days*. While some may find it a bit unusual to sit down for a read on a work-day morning I do this for a living, so brushing aside the slight stirrings of guilt, I had a sip of coffee and settled down.

Tom's book has a real old-school look to it: the cover is sturdy, matte, sleek, the pages the right thickness and feel and the book itself carries just enough weight – in essence, a book lover's kind of book. It

“... AND WHAT I FIND PARTICULARLY PLEASING IS WHEN A WRITER HAS THE ABILITY TO MAKE YOU FEEL YOU ARE THERE RIGHT NEXT TO HIM AS HE LAYS DOWN HIS PROSE. THIS KIND OF AUTHOR IS SPREAD A LITTLE THIN...”

continued on page 79



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New Loop 7X fly rod series

This issue: TCFF puts the Loop 7X F 9ft 5-wt through its paces.



For this issue, TCFF reviewed an innovative product from Loop Tackle, its latest and greatest – the Loop 7X fly rod. While Loop is slowly but surely making inroads in our local industry, overseas it is a well-known and highly respected brand, not only for its rods and reels but also for all kinds of other fly fishing tackle and gear. Having recently tested the Loop Evotec rod and being suitably impressed (see review in issue 258) we were excited at the prospect of test-driving this new offering from Loop, especially since it features patented new technology in the manufacturing of rod blanks, which is creating quite a stir in the world of high-end fly rods.

Our test rod arrived in a cream-coloured, sturdy aluminium tube with the Loop 7X logo boldly printed in large black lettering. Out of the tube and its cloth bag, the rod's heptagonal blank design was immediately evident. Having done a little research beforehand to see what the fuss with this new design was all about, we learnt that it purported to offer performance enhancements relating to power transfer and rod-tracking abilities, among other things. These are relevant insofar as accuracy and casting performance are concerned and thus noteworthy. According to Loop, its 2-3-2 design provides structural support that offers enhanced improvements in the rod's tracking ability when cast in all planes, and not only in the traditional horizontal plane. Loop also states that the heptagonal construction

provides for a lighter blank than would normally be the case in conventional round blank construction. Quite a mouthful, and intriguing to say the least.

This is Loop's top-of-the-line offering, competing in a price bracket that showcases the best that rod manufacturers have to offer, and, as such, one would expect the components and final makeup of the rod to be of the highest quality. In this regard, there is very little to fault on the 7X. Even to a novice it will be patently clear that this is a high-end piece of equipment. Starting with the butt section, it sports a full wells, high-quality cork grip, with hardened sections at both ends. The grip is very comfortable and will suit most hand sizes. The reel seat comprises a gunmetal-grey aluminium, which is also part heptagonal, with a sliding hood that slides up in fixed position, ensuring it is always in the right position to accept the reel foot. A nice touch, as sliding hoods that rotate around the reel seat can be quite irritating if you need to seat the reel in bad light. The locking ring is solid and locks the reel firmly in place.

Inside the reel seat is a graphite tube, visible through cut-out sections of the seat (probably to shave off a bit of weight) with the 7X logo again featuring prominently. Finally, the line weight of the rod is displayed clearly on the underside of the seat. What is interesting is that the 7X F features a fighting butt, unusual for a 5-wt, but very neat, nonetheless.

The section above the grip is silver with black or dark-blue thread wrapping and carries the name of the rod and its designation, all neatly done in black lettering. The blank itself is matte grey (which should eliminate rod flash), with a single marking dot to line up the next section. These dots also feature on sections two and three, making lining up the sections a no-brainer. The wrappings are the same as on the butt section, but a nice added touch is that each section carries the full name and designation of the rod in small print at the beginning of the section – very useful if you own more than one of these rods in different weights. The hardware comprises titanium stripping and snake guides, which are long-lived and apt for a rod of this stature. Our impression of this rod is that it is of quality construction with high-end components, and has a classy, purposeful look to it. Nothing too fancy or flashy to our minds, and the way a top-end working rod should look.

Of particular interest is that the 7X range comprises 19 models in various lengths from 3-wt all the way to 12-wt. In the 5-wt category the rod comes in four different variations, with the 9' rods in a MF (medium fast) and an F (fast) version. Our test rod was the 9' F model and we opted to test it with a standard weight floating forward line. We married the rod to a Shilton CR3 and immediately noticed how light in the hand it feels. On our office scale it weighed just over 30oz, so from that standpoint it is certainly not the

lightest 5-wt we have cast but in hand it certainly feels light enough. That was a promising sign, for an early indication of a good rod is that it feels comfortable from the moment you pick it up. The 7X F did not disappoint in that department, being light and well balanced.

First off, we tried some long-distance casting with and without water hauls, changing direction in mid-cast and casting the rod in different planes. With a standard WF5F line we could cast the full line, while also being able to exert good control over what the line was doing when a sudden change of direction was required. The rod blank never feels under pressure, transmitting energy almost effortlessly and not shying away from direction changes as some rods do. Tracking was impeccable and fly delivery very accurate with enough feel for delicate presentations. The 7X F can carry a lot of line in the air without overloading, and tip and

blank recovery is extremely quick, as long, accurate casts are easily achieved. Loop size is very controllable, and the rod is capable of casting razor-sharp thin loops when called upon to do so. What impressed most was its ability to almost effortlessly hit targets at between 50 and 70 feet with pin-point accuracy; in fact, we felt it exceeded the accuracy capabilities of most other rods we have previously cast. To put this to the test, we cast two other high-end fast-action rods that have a reputation for being accurate, put them through the same exercise and our suspicions were confirmed: the 7X F is definitely in a class of its own.

In essence, there seems to be a lot of merit for the design of the 7X. What particularly impressed was the rod's ability to switch from one plane to another in mid-casting stroke without losing composure and still track true. While its accuracy over mid and long distances is

astonishing to say the least, in short range, although still accurate, the 7X F loses a bit of feel which, perhaps, is why there is a 7X MF model. Having not cast that model we can't offer comment, but certainly understand the need for a rod with a slightly slower action if fishing short distances will be your main focus. No one rod can do it all, and if you are mainly fishing larger rivers or stillwaters and you want accuracy and pin-point delicate presentations, this is the tool for you. It will not only get the job done, but better than many other rods in this weight and price class. And, may we add, almost effortlessly. It would be very interesting to see how this rod fares in a shootout against other top-end brand rods. We think it may do more than just hold its own. Kudos, Loop Tackle!

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“WHAT PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED WAS THE ROD’S ABILITY TO SWITCH FROM ONE PLANE TO ANOTHER IN MID-CASTING STROKE WITHOUT LOSING COMPOSURE AND STILL TRACK TRUE.”



“Yet More Sweet Days” continued from page 76

well as tying recipes for some great patterns. However, if you know what to look for, throughout the book he mentions things that will make you a better fly fisher, mostly casual comments, but fly fishing gold all the same.

From the get-go, Tom takes the reader with him as he visits favourite haunts and hallowed waters both locally and beyond our shores. And very soon you slot comfortably into the passenger seat as he journeys from one place to another, meeting up with old and new friends, reminiscing about and recalling past experiences while the golden thread runs through – his love for fly fishing. The author has a keen sense of observation and detail, which makes the experiences shared so much more personal for the reader – you literally feel you have been there with him.

Having known Tom and most of the people he mentions in the book for a long time, the journey becomes even more personal, the personality traits of those he encounters familiar, but with his unique attention to detail, now even more recognisable. Some I haven't seen in years, but thanks to Tom it feels like we met up again just yesterday.

It's a hard book to put down, especially if you love trout and fly fishing. Tom writes in a way that expresses a deep affection for both species and the pursuit, something which also shines through in his art, painting being another of his extraordinary talents. He has authored six books and no doubt you have them all, as do I, and almost every fly fisher that I know. Among his previously published works are some outstanding gems, but I

dare say *Yet More Sweet Days* will probably become my favourite. I say become because I like to reread books that I really enjoy and every time I read a Sutcliffe book I think it's the best he's done, and so, hot on the heels of this one, *Hunting Trout* and some of his earlier works are on the list again.

In the end, did it pass the ultimate test? Well, apart from the pleasure I had reading it, the fly boxes brimming with new flies and a planned trip back to Rhodes and other old haunts, speak volumes I guess. As does the new rod. I also need to look up some old friends again, all thanks to *Yet More Sweet Days*. I loved it and suspect you will too.

Seriously, get the book. This man can light a fire like nobody else.

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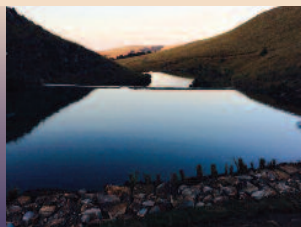
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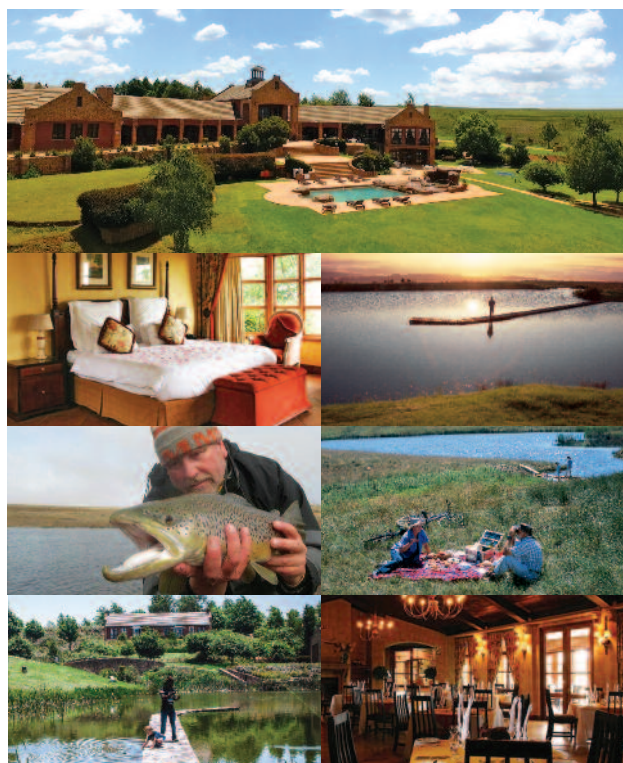


The Estate is situated in the heart of the Highlands Meander, near Machadodorp and just outside Dullstroom, only two to three hours either Pretoria or Johannesburg, with good roads leading to the venue.

ACCOMMODATION: The Estate offers luxury accommodation with beautiful views, ideal for a family vacation or business travellers. Options include 14 twin lakeside suites; 20 twin estate rooms; and 10 elegant two-bedroomed, six-sleeper self-contained lodges. Each beautifully appointed room has a magnificent view of the rolling hills. Enjoy culinary delights from sumptuous breakfasts served in the enclosed terrace to delicious dinners in The Triple Twigs, 60 seater dining room – or private dining room for something more intimate. Light meals are available in the Teddy and Tankard Pub.

THE FISHING: The Estate offers six dams, of which four are stocked with sizeable trout weighing up to 2kg. Catch-and-release is encouraged, and kept fish are charged at R100/kg. No rod fees apply.

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Tugela River Lodge is a self-catering bush camp, located on a private cattle and game farm on the banks of the Tugela River near Winterton.

ACCOMMODATION: Rustic and pet-friendly accommodation offers a total of 34 beds in stand-alone thatched cottages. The Lodge: an 18 bed set-up; The Hideaway: 6 sleeper; Rapids: 4 sleeper; River House: 4 sleeper.

THE FISHING: Boats are provided free of charge for use on the river. Life jackets are also supplied. The Tugela River is ideal for fly fishermen wanting to target KZN scaly (yellowfish), carp, barbel, tilapia and bass.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: There are numerous hiking paths and trail running/MTB trails on the game farm for the experienced. There are shorter routes suitable for less experienced riders. We offer guided trips on prior arrangement. Our routes are newly marked and sign posted. We have an 8km river trail and two 11km and 17km mountain bike trails through the game reserve where one can get up close and personal with the friendly giraffe and get a taste of what the Berg and Bush Cycle trails have to offer. The tracks include a wonderful shady path along the Tugela River, and countless cattle and game paths on the game farm. Game include giraffe, zebra, impala, kudu, eland, red hartebeest and warthog. Our bird list is in the region of 270 species.



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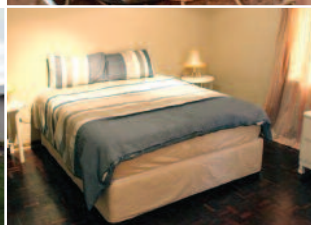
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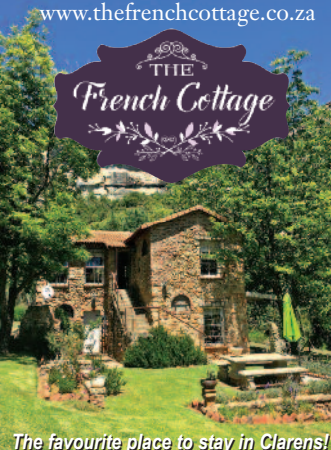
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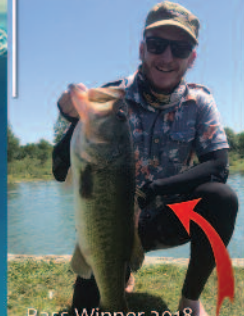
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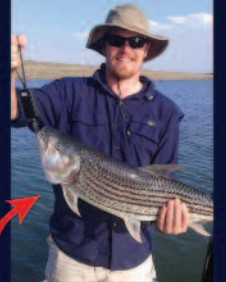
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a number of the Worms such as Clod, The Bard and Herman Jass are eager followers of the little dimpled white ball, and when I see the feelings a bad swing engenders, I can't for the life of me see why you would let this game spoil what would otherwise be a good walk.

Now it may be that from time to time you may execute a bad cast, spook a fish, get your fly in a tree or be subjected to any of the other myriad minor annoyances that befall even the best of fly fishers, but I wouldn't think that it would cast a pall over the whole weekend. I remember as a youth watching armies of uncles setting out in the morning for a round of golf with a smile on their faces and eagerness in their eyes, and returning at lunchtime in thunderous moods and with a mild aroma of booze, and wondering to myself why on earth people would inflict this sort of unhappiness on themselves in the name of recreation and relaxation. I have yet to see a fisherman throw his rod down on the ground and smash it and storm away cursing.

I am sure you all know the line attributed to AK Best: "The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad" – a good distinction because, as we all know, fishing is not only about fish, but as one commentator remarked, "This planet is covered with sordid men that demand that he who spends time fishing shall show returns in fish." I am also sure that, like me, you are well and truly tired of nonfisher folk whose first question is, "How many did you catch?" and then following this up with the observation that they would never have the patience to fish. This sort of thing drives me mad, but even worse, at a loss for a short but withering put-down with which to sort them out. They just don't get it, do they?

Perhaps a line like: "Fish come and go, but it is the memory of the afternoons on the stream that endures" might help them understand, but on balance, I don't think so. They don't have the soul or the insight to understand the motto of the Flyfishers' Club in London, *Piscator non solum piscatur*, which translated, if I recall my Latin from school and university, means: "A fisherman does not only fish." Perhaps a looser translation might be: "A fisherman does not only catch fish." I

am not sure if you can say the same of a golfer – that he doesn't only hit his balls...

As Arnold Gingrich, himself a noted fishing scribe, said: "The fish is not so much your quarry as your partner." I really identify with that, and when I have a few days on the river, I only want to catch one fish – just to prove to myself that I still can. Thereafter, I actually can feel my spirit soar and can begin to enter that Zen state that sometimes comes over you. I have caught a lot of fish in my time and I don't really need to catch a lot more – just that one per outing, which shows me that I still can.

**"... THE WORDS ATTRIBUTED
TO A CERTAIN TONY
BLAKE THAT, 'SOME GO TO
CHURCH AND THINK ABOUT
FISHING, OTHERS GO
FISHING AND THINK ABOUT
GOD.' I WILL SAY NO MORE.
IF YOU DON'T GET IT,
THEN I THINK YOU SHOULD
TAKE UP GOLF."**

Thereafter, I think of the words of Herbert Hoover, a president of the USA who noted that, "Lots of people committed crimes during the year who would not have done so if they had been fishing. The increase of crime is among those deprived of the regeneration that impregnates the mind and character of the fisherman." How's that for a cure to our domestic crime wave? Well, perhaps not, as Doug Larson remarked, "If people concentrated on the really important things in life, there'd be a shortage of fishing poles."

Of course, a large number of these quotes have a touch of humour in them and sometimes reflect the commonly held view, among nonfishers I must add, that all those who pick up a fishing rod are liars. This, of course, is not true and any good tale, even one about golf, is enhanced by a little poetic licence.

Besides, as that well-known source A Nonymous said, "Bragging may not bring happiness, but no man having caught a large fish goes home through an alley." Perhaps this is the vestigial hunter-gatherer thing, the inherited imperative that we all still have of wanting to bring home sustenance to those in the cave. We all have it, although it is closer to the surface in some rather than in others. Anyway, I know where I fall – I would far rather go fishing than go to the supermarket, and I am not that far from being in the cave that I don't know how to gut my own fish, or prepare for the table something I have shot. There is a satisfaction in that as well, and besides, as a matter of ethics, I neither fish nor shoot for anything that I don't eat. That's killing for its own sake.

I don't think it applies to catch-and-release, but I am not really convinced of this, and it's something I have pondered at length. I guess I've come to terms with it, but there is this lingering trace of doubt. What I do know is my feelings when I read in fishing record books about a group stating with a certain smugness that they returned 70 fish or something like that. That is excessive, uncalled for, and, for me anyway, is no longer ethical or sporting. I don't know what the ideal catch number is, you will need to work that out yourself, but if I have caught three or four fish, that's enough.

Reminds me of the line attributed to the 19th-century American essayist and philosopher Henry David Thoreau that, "Many men go fishing all their lives without knowing it's not the fish they are after", to which I might add the words attributed to a certain Tony Blake that, "Some go to church and think about fishing, others go fishing and think about God." I will say no more. If you don't get it, then I think you should take up golf.

When I started writing this, I thought it might turn out quite light and possibly humorous. It didn't quite make it, but a little bit of thought about what it is about fishing that brings you back to it time and again is no bad thing. Next issue, I promise you I will lighten up. Until then, remember the words of Patrick McManus: "There is no greater fan of fly fishing than the worm." Think about it.



Photo: Rasmus Ovesen

Fishing lines

We all know the saying: “Give a man a fish...”

ANDREW LEVY shares a few more pearls of wisdom.



Gunga Donn of the Woolly Worms, now resident in the depths of Oz, has always been a well-read and most erudite fellow – a man with a happy smile and a sense of humour, sharp as a razor. Behind his bearded visage lies the soul of a philosopher and a man who can look at life with a quizzical glance. He also has a strong literary bent, reads widely and from time to time comes across something which he thinks might appeal to me, and even possibly give me the basis for a column. Well, he has come good again, and as I was casting about for a topic, an e-mail arrived and solved the issue for me.

The piece was published on an American blog, obviously by an outdoorsman and a dedicated fisher. It contains a list of what he calls “The Best Fishing Lines” – short and pithy sayings which contain little gems of wisdom and insight. So with thanks to Gunga Donn, let me share some of them with you. If you think about them, you will find there is real wisdom here – of the sort that only comes when walking the waters with rod in hand. As Grandfather Izaak Walton said, fishing is the “contemplative man’s recreation”. He also gave the advice that has more thought in these words than anyone who is not a fisher-

man might ever imagine: “Rivers and the inhabitants of the watery element are made for wise men to contemplate, and for fools to pass by without consideration.”

Here’s a line that may help you when you spend more than you should at the tackle shop, and wake up the next morning with the bitter taste of buyer’s remorse in your mouth: “The man who coined the phrase, ‘money can’t buy happiness’ never bought himself a good fly rod.” Now how’s that? Reminds me that my grandmother used to wryly remark from time to time that “happiness is the one thing that can’t buy you money”. That may be very true, but then ponder for a moment the happiness you get from a good afternoon when the fish are rising freely and coming to the dry fly, your casts alight like thistledown and there is not even a suspicion of drag, and tell me if you would rather have the money.

Of course, you could always go and play golf, a pastime which has come in for some sharp remarks from the bankside thinkers. So, for example, Paul O’Neil remarked: “I am not against golf, since I cannot but suspect it keeps armies of the unworthy from discovering trout.” I am not a golfer myself, but

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