

Holistic Hobbies

By Dawid Rossouw

The golden thread that runs through all my outdoor adventures is fly tying. It connects hunting, wing shooting and fly fishing and, at the same time, it individually enhances each of these pursuits. It also reminds me of great times that I have had and it stimulates me to think ahead and to plan the great adventures of the future. This is more or less how it works:

One evening during our last hunting adventure in the Kalahari, we were relaxing around the camelthorn campfire while we waited for enough coals to start preparing dinner. (I refuse to degrade our adventure by calling it a 'trip', and calling it a safari would be stretching the truth a bit too much, even in hunting/shooting/fishing language.) We go to a little extra trouble to eat and drink well and our camp cooking in the bundu is normally outstanding. We had meanwhile made some starters to keep the hunger at bay. Thinly sliced cold-smoked trout on seed loaf enhanced with freshly ground black pepper and a few drops of fresh lime juice proved absolutely delicious - but there was a lot more to it than just how great it tasted!

That trout was one that I had taken from a stretch of private water on the lower Molenaars just before the fishing season closed. I shall spare you the detail, except to say that I caught it on a fly that was tied with, among other things, feathers from a guinea fowl that I shot last season near Darling. That was another wonderful outing with great companions and super dog work. Old Simba gave a rock-steady point on that bird and Coco retrieved it afterwards. Enjoying the wonderful taste of that particular trout, I could recall in vivid detail the day I caught it. I could almost see and hear the river and the fish, how I outsmarted it and how it fought and how I almost lost it when I was careless with the net. My priest is made from the tip of a kudu horn from Groot Waterval in the Karoo and I could almost feel its weight and shape in my hand. That bit of horn made it easy to retrieve the memories of the hunt with my father that eventually resulted in my unusual priest. As I tasted the smokiness of the fish, it brought back the aroma of the Romeo & Julietta that I enjoyed after landing that brilliantly coloured rainbow of about two pounds.



Birds for the pot provide feathers for flies. Paddy Lindop (left) and Dawid Rossouw, after a successful guinea fowl shoot



Dawid Rossouw with a Karoo springbok - more fly tying material to complete the circle.

It also made me think about the next day's hunt. I was after a nice springbok ram, which would provide delicious sirloins to braai when next we hunted birds and also great droëwors and biltong to pack when I go fishing. I realised that I had never tied a fly using springbok hair. It would have a range of colours from pure white, through tan to dark brown and I was sure that I could find just the right kind of hair for tying some nymphs. I thought that it might work especially well for making tails and wing cases. The long white pronk hair on its back was bound to be good for something. I wondered if it would float like klipspringer and deer hair, in which case it could work for DDD's and G&B low floaters. I decided that there could be absolutely no harm in trying it out.

Now, do you see how this type of interconnected thinking can run away with you? The possibilities are absolutely endless and the power of it is completely unlimited. The value that I get from it is something that cannot be bought with all the money on this earth. Never make the mistake of thinking that it is only about nostalgia and the past, it is equally about focusing on the future!

When the trout season opens again in springtime, I shall try out my new springbok flies. They will most likely look terrible to any fly-tier worth his salt, but I bet that I shall get a few fish on them. They won't be great inventions and there will probably be other much more effective flies that I could fish with, but I shall be fishing them with precisely the right kind of attitude to catch fish, and that will make them work for me. Every time I tie on one of those flies, it will bring back priceless memories of the hunt together with a little sadness and respect for the magnificent springbok. I shall also remember exactly the taste of that smoked trout that we had around the fire, the setting, the friends and the atmosphere surrounding it all. Even if I catch nothing, I can still be assured of a great day's fishing with all the memories that my unusual flies will stimulate.

Almost all the trout that I catch will be released, but every now and then, especially with the hunting season approaching, I shall keep one to enjoy around the campfire and to complete the circle.



"The angler hopes for nothing and prays for everything; he expects nothing and accepts all that comes his way. And although he knows all along that he will never sink his hook into a trout stream's true mystery, the desire to try, to cast once more and once more again, is never unquenched, for there is always that chance that one more cast will carry him beyond skill and luck and bring him untarnished magic. "

Harry Middleton, The Earth is Enough.