

The masters on the nymph

Korrie Broos

In the days before the internet and fly fishing chat rooms, knowledge was exchanged once a week during in the Cape Piscatorial Society's club evening.

The experienced stream anglers, beer in hand, or maybe a whisky and soda, chatted about fish rising to a dry fly, or what to do to get the fish to rise to a dry.

Nymphing and nymphs were hardly mentioned. If they did talk about a nymph, it was a Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear, or maybe a dragonfly nymph for the still waters.

If the water was high when you went fishing, they said, you could, as a last resort, contemplate using a nymph and a strike indicator but far better to persevere with a high-floating Variant like the RAB.

The CPS library, was another source of information, and it was here, between all the books on fishing dry flies, fishing small streams with the dry fly, tying dry flies, and a couple of books on salt water fly fishing, that I discovered a book on nymphing.

It was a fairly old book, but it had clearly not been read very often as it showed none of the wear and tear so manifest in the books on the dry fly. I cannot remember the title or the author but I can still see its yellow and black cover in my minds' eye.

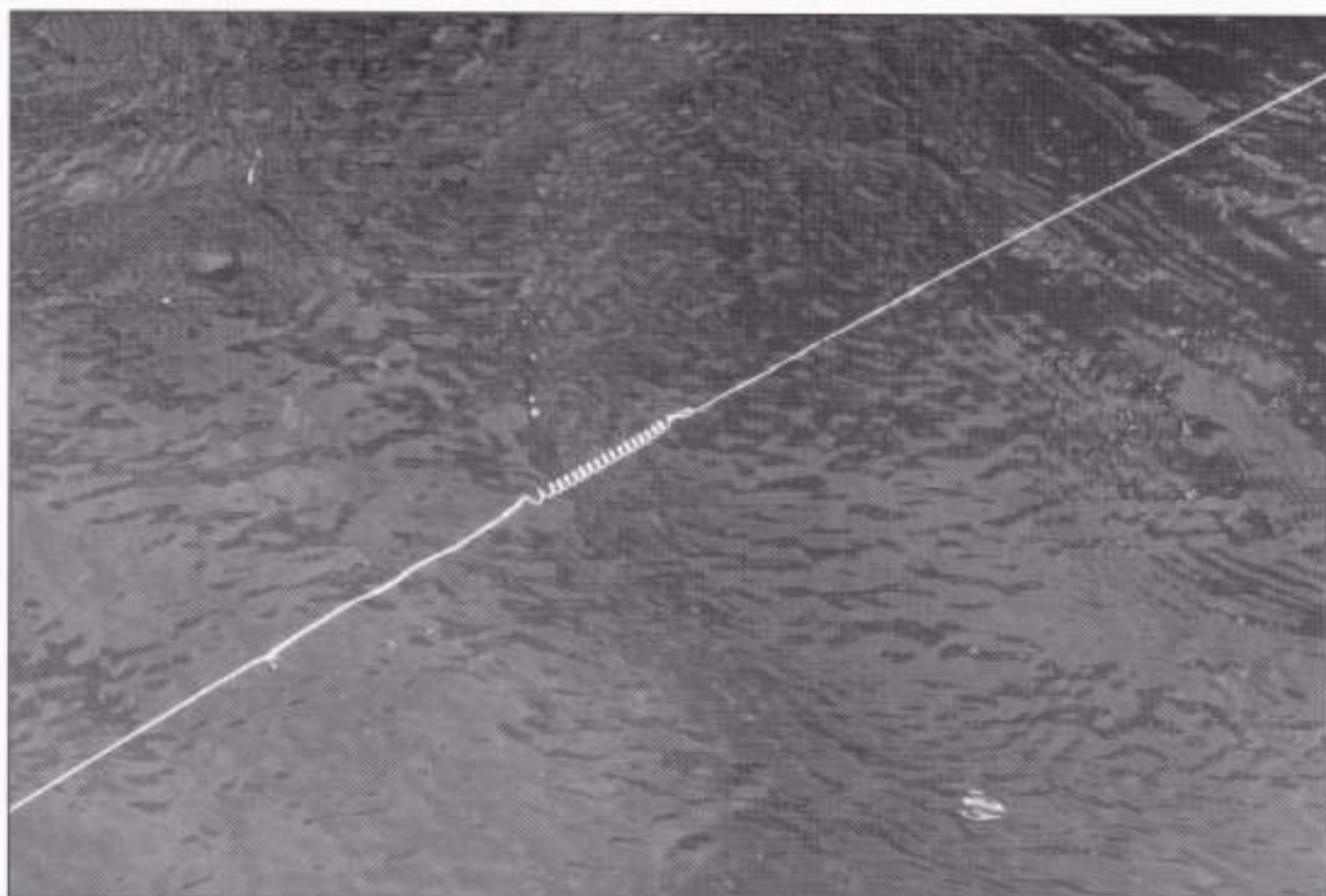
I opened the book and somehow the first sentence I read was: "Trout eat nymphs at least 80% of the time". Although I had only recently started fly fishing, I could not understand why they never talked about nymphs in the clubroom. Only dry fly. Adams this, Elk Hair caddis that, a DDD here and a RAB there.

That was in 1996. Thinking back now, it was the dark ages of fly fishing for me.

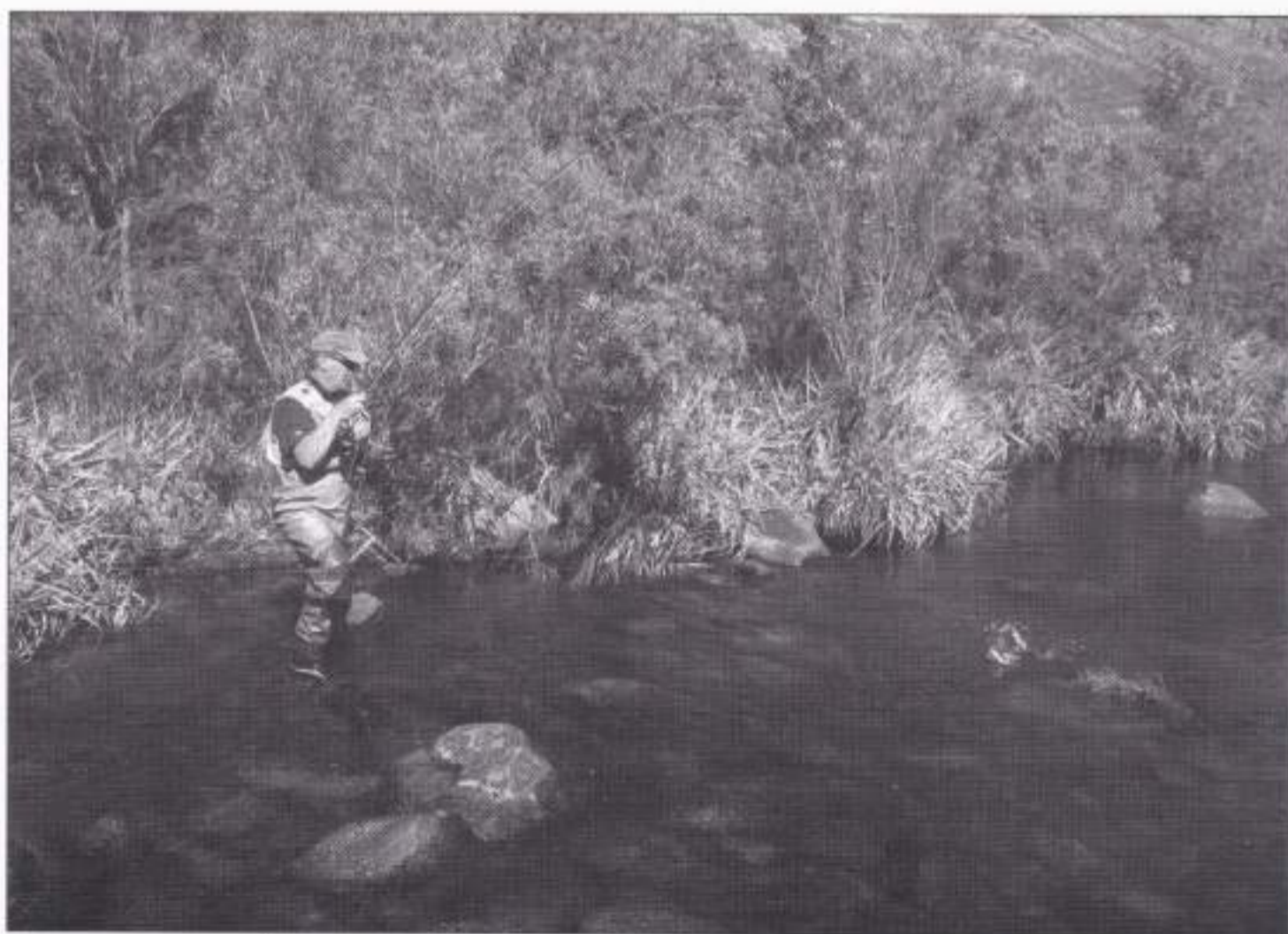
The crux of this nymphing book was the importance of a nymph with zero density. This was very important. If the nymph was weighted, it would have drag and drag, I was led to believe, was your biggest enemy while fly fishing. I was, however, to come to the realisation almost a decade later that, when nymphing, drag can be far more of an asset than a liability. What an anomaly.

I studied this book like a devout student - how to weight the leader, so that you could get the unweighted nymph to the requisite depth. Split shot on the leader was way to go. You kept on adding split shot, until you hung up on the river bed. One of the sentences in the book indicated that: 'When you are nymphing correctly, it is the norm to get stuck, accept it and live with it.' The frustration level was high, but the 80% rule stuck in my head. Nymphing was the way to go.

In 1999 I read the first article about Czech nymphing in *Trout & Salmon* magazine. In the article they described how the Czechs fished their nymphs, but, more importantly, how



The coiled mono strike indicator which has a variety of names including 'pigtail' and 'corkscrew'.



Jiri Klima hooks a trout on the Holsloot during his visit in 2007.

they tied them. I tied a couple, but never mastered the correct way to fish them.

In 2001 the South African team participated for the first time in the annual FIPS-Mouche World Fly Fishing Championships. It was held in Sweden and they returned with a greatly enhanced knowledge of Czech nymphing.

Some information started to filter through the system and printed media about Czech nymphing and how effective it was on the Smallmouth Yellowfish on the Vaal and Orange Rivers and their tributaries.

In 2002 I was appointed manager of the South African team competing in the World Fly Fishing Championship which, in that year, was held in France. Now the manager has a bit more freedom during the competition sessions and I spent some time observing our rivals fishing their respective beats. I ended up watching a French fly fisher. This is the first time I saw the French coiled mono leader, sometimes also called a 'slinky', being used. I realised that this strike indicator made from brightly-coloured mono like Stren and coiled like a spring, was vastly superior to the methods I was used to. No strike indicator made from yarn, floating putty or a buoyant dry fly like the Elk Hair Caddis, had the sensitivity, versatility or effectiveness of this coil. That evening I excitedly told the team about this super strike indicator, but you don't learn new techniques in the middle of a competition. Today, you just have to type, 'coiled mono strike indicator' into your computer's search engine to be regaled with articles on their use and YouTube videos on their construction but, back then, such knowledge was not freely available.

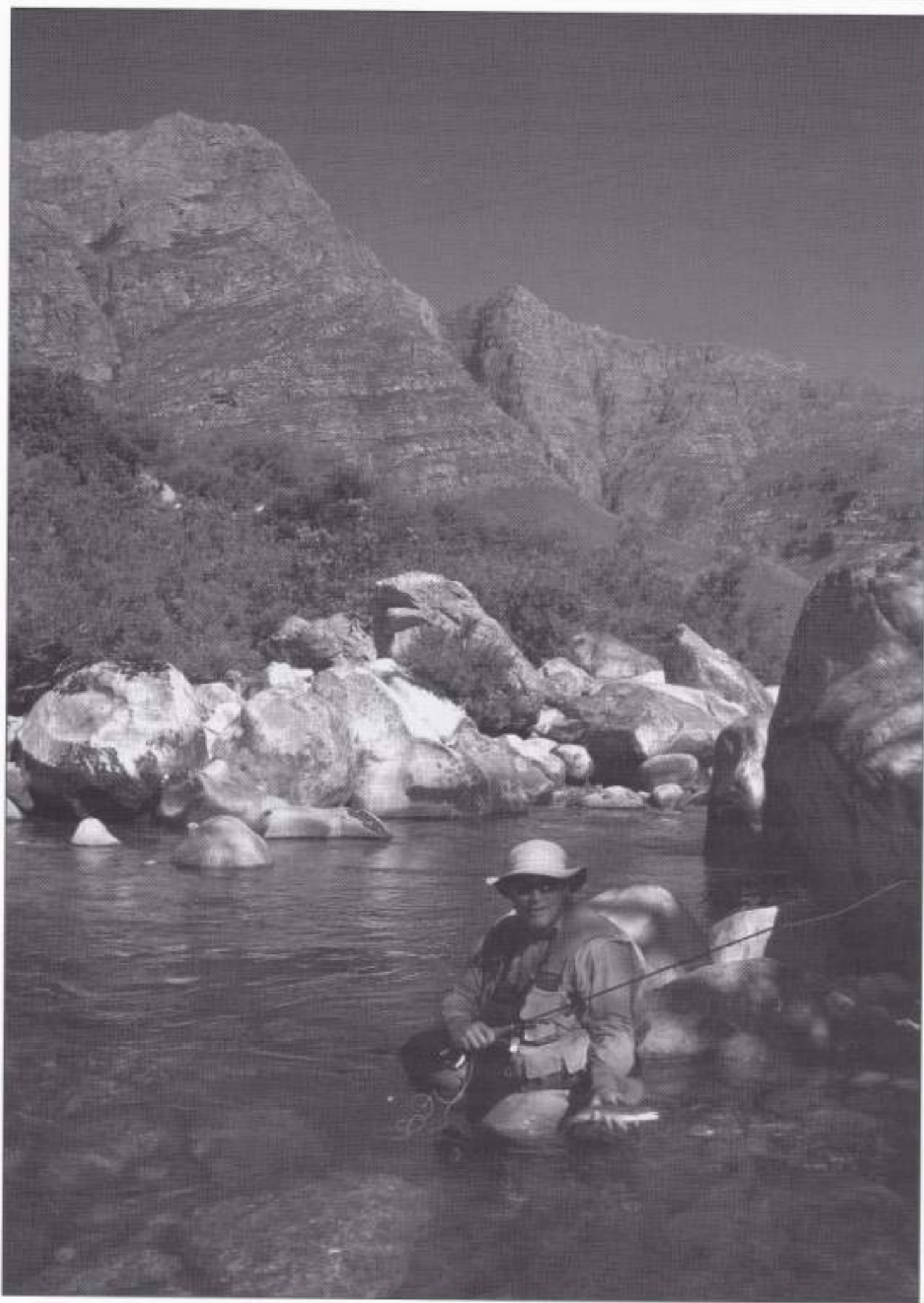
It was also during this time that I met the Italian captain, Edoardo Ferrero. We exchanged pleasantries a couple of times and, at the end of the competition, I promised I would send him a memento from South Africa. It was not easy to decide on a suitable gift, but eventually I settled on a subscription for a South African fly fishing magazine.

The next year, at the 2003 World Fly Fishing Championship in Spain, I again saw Edoardo. We were now firm friends – he had, after all, been reading for almost a year about fly fishing in Southern Africa. Over a glass of wine we talked more and more. An Italian won the world championship and I fished with him on one of the official practice days.

What impressed me was that he only fished the nymph and, every now and again, he would adjust his technique, doing different things with his fly rod. I was too far away to ascertain what he was doing and, as it was a day before the competition, it was to be expected that he would not reveal his most refined techniques to a member of an opposing team.

At the end of the competition, I asked him what his secret flies were. He gave me two nymphs which, he said, probably caught 85% of his fish. During the trip back to our hotel after the closing ceremony, I invited Edoardo to visit me in South Africa. This was to happen sooner than we realised.

At the end of the end of the competition, Vladi Trzebunia, a previous world champion and one of the originators of the Polish nymphing techniques, was asked to give a talk for a TV show. I was there in a flash, eager to learn more about his technique of tying woven



Korrie Broos with a trout caught on the lower Molenaars using a Czech nymph and a coiled mono strike indicator.

nymphs and how to fish them.

Listening to this great fly angler talking about weighting the nymphs and how to fish them opened another chapter for me. Here, one of the great nymph fly fishers, was showing and telling his audience how to add so much weight to a fly that it would drag, but also how to manoeuvre the fly along the river bed, with drag and, in the process, improve your catch rate.

It was also during the 2003 Championships that my friendship with Jiri Klima, Karel Krivanec and the Czech fly fishers started. One morning all the captains and managers were having a late breakfast before leaving to support their competing team members.

Jiri and Karel were sitting at the bottom end of the table and I watched as Jiri explained to Karel how to provoke a fish into taking. Even though I could not understand a word, I was able to understand Jiri's description of the 'teasing take', a technique that has subsequently proved deadly on all the waters I have fished. Jiri looked up, saw me watching and stopped his explanation - but too late. I had learned another nymphing technique.

After the breakfast I introduced myself to them and enquired about Jiri's recently-patented micro nymphs. Karel translated and said we could take the discussion further after the competition.

At the end of the competition, I invited Karel to bring some of his Czech flies to my hotel room and explain his methods of tying and fishing them. His demonstration lasted more than an hour, and it was the start of an enduring friendship.

Having watched some of the world's best fly fishers in France and Spain, I realised that the South African team had much to learn. I emailed Edoardo Ferrero shortly after the world championships. I asked him if he would come to South Africa and teach us what he had gleaned from participating as competitor and team captain in 23 World Championships. At first he was very skeptical but, when I told him his plane ticket was available for collection at a travel agent in Milan, he realised how serious I was.

I picked him up at the Johannesburg International Airport and we drove to the National Fly Fishing Championships being held in Ugie in the Eastern Cape. He spent hours with the various participants showing them various techniques. This visit to South Africa probably started the serious use of wet flies in South Africa in the modern era. I remember a specific occasion on the stream, when Edoardo tied a on a soft hackle remarking that the 10cm deep water was perfect for these flies. To this day, his heavily Italian-accented, sonorous sentence is quoted in local fly fishing conversations: "A softa hackela fly is probably da mosta effectiva way to catcha the fish". In the evenings, the information was equally generously conveyed. With flies, like the one feather CDC dry fly, the Arpo, (*The best and worst of it*, by Tom Sutcliffe, *Piscator* No 135, November 2003) and various Italian nymphs, he significantly changed the approach of all the fly fishers he met. He enjoyed South Africa so much, that after five days, he had a tour organised for himself, his wife, his son and his best friend, Pier-Luigi Concito, who has won two gold medals as individual world champion and a bronze medal for third place. In December 2003, Edoardo, his family and friends stayed with me for two weeks in Cape Town. But such hospitality should not go unanswered he reckoned. An invitation was extended to visit him and fish

with some of the best fly fishers in Italy. His plane had hardly left and my tickets were booked. Italy here I come (See *Fly Fishing Italy*, *Piscator* No 136, November 2004). I fished with Edoardo's friends on their home waters. Carlos Baldessini, a silver medalist in the World FF Championship, took me to the Sangro River and taught me how to fish the nymph as a living insect.

Pier-Luigi Concito demonstrated surface nymphing with weighted flies and techniques for provoking takes. On the Lima River, Alessandro Sgrani, European champion, showed me what true 'dead-drifting' with zero drag means and how surreptitiously trout can take a fly. In the Dolomite Mountains, one of fly fishing's most innovative thinkers Francesco Palu, showed me the value of an extendable rod and how effective very long rods can be when nymphing. (<http://www.flyfishingpalu.com/>)

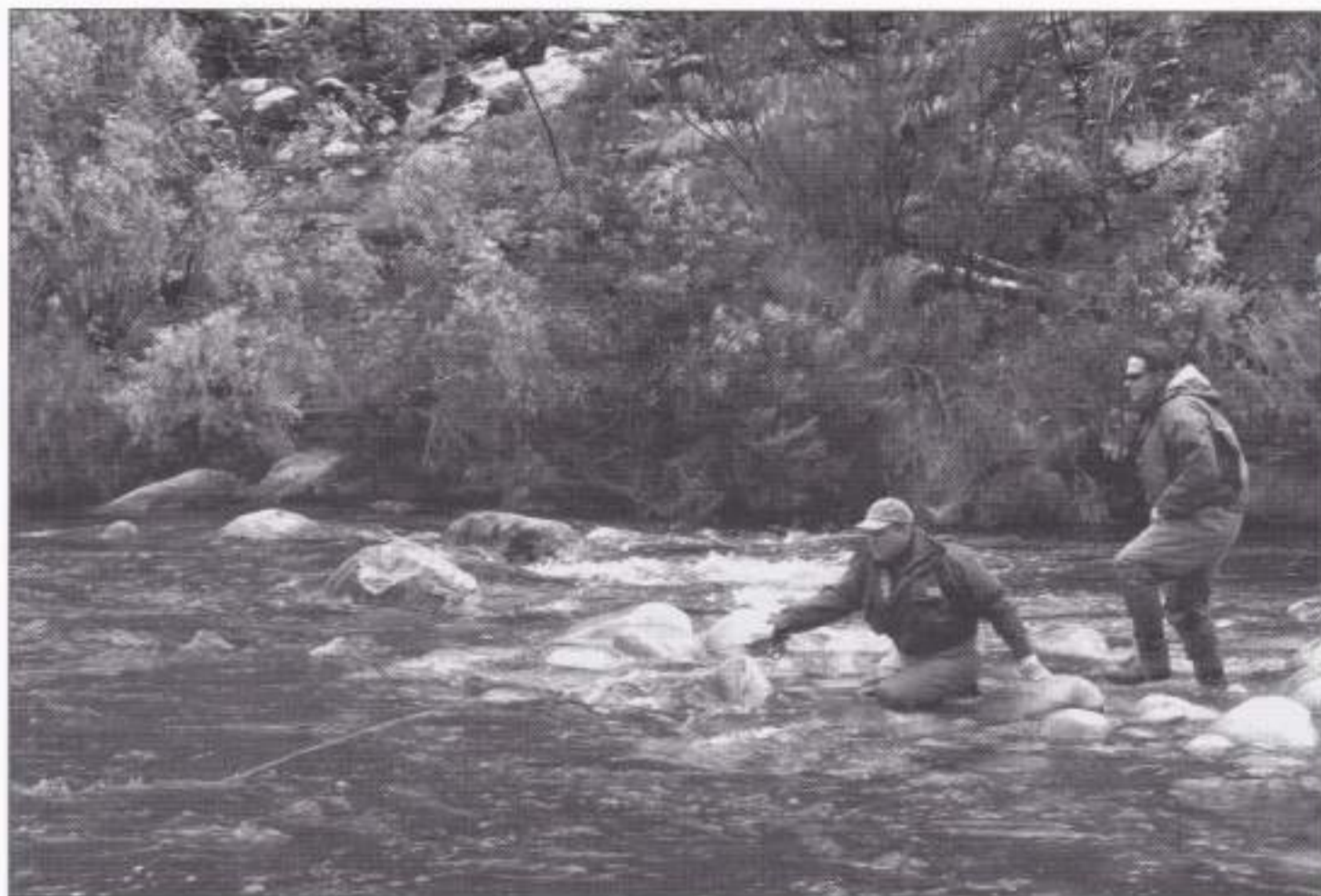
After three weeks in Italy, I left for home with my nymphing knowledge having increased exponentially but, suddenly, more information was becoming available and local interest was growing. CPS chairman, MC Coetzer, for example, wrote *Advanced leader systems*, based on French formulae and techniques in *Piscator* No 138 (November 2006).

A year later, Karel Krivanec's book, *Czech nymphing and other related methods*, was published, giving a bit more detail about French nymphing. This was another technique to master and many leaders were tied to recommended formulae and boiled to give them greater elasticity.

Much of the increased local interest in European nymphing methods was generated because of the exponential growth in fly fishing for yellowfish in the Vaal River and Orange Rivers and their tributaries. (See *Short-line Mono Nymphing*, by Garth Wellman, *Piscator* No 134, November 2002 and *Yellowfish on the Orange River: a new fly fishing frontier*, by Tim Rolston, *Piscator* No 135, November 2003.)

I had read on the internet about Jiri Klima's *Czech Nymph Master Class* held in the Czech Republic and how highly rated it was by those who had attended (<http://www.czechnymphs.com>). An email to Jiri expressing my interest in hosting him in South Africa, with his Czech nymph classes, set the ball rolling. Many emails later, Jiri Klima and Karel Krivanec were on the plane to South Africa. Czech Nymph Master Classes were held in Natal, on the Vaal River and in the Cape. I can still hear Jiri's words, in his heavy Czech/Slavic accent, "Foer nymphing, you moest practise", and, by the end of their visit, I had developed a very useful understanding of how to tie Czech nymphs and how to fish them. (<http://klimaproducts.cz/about-us/>).

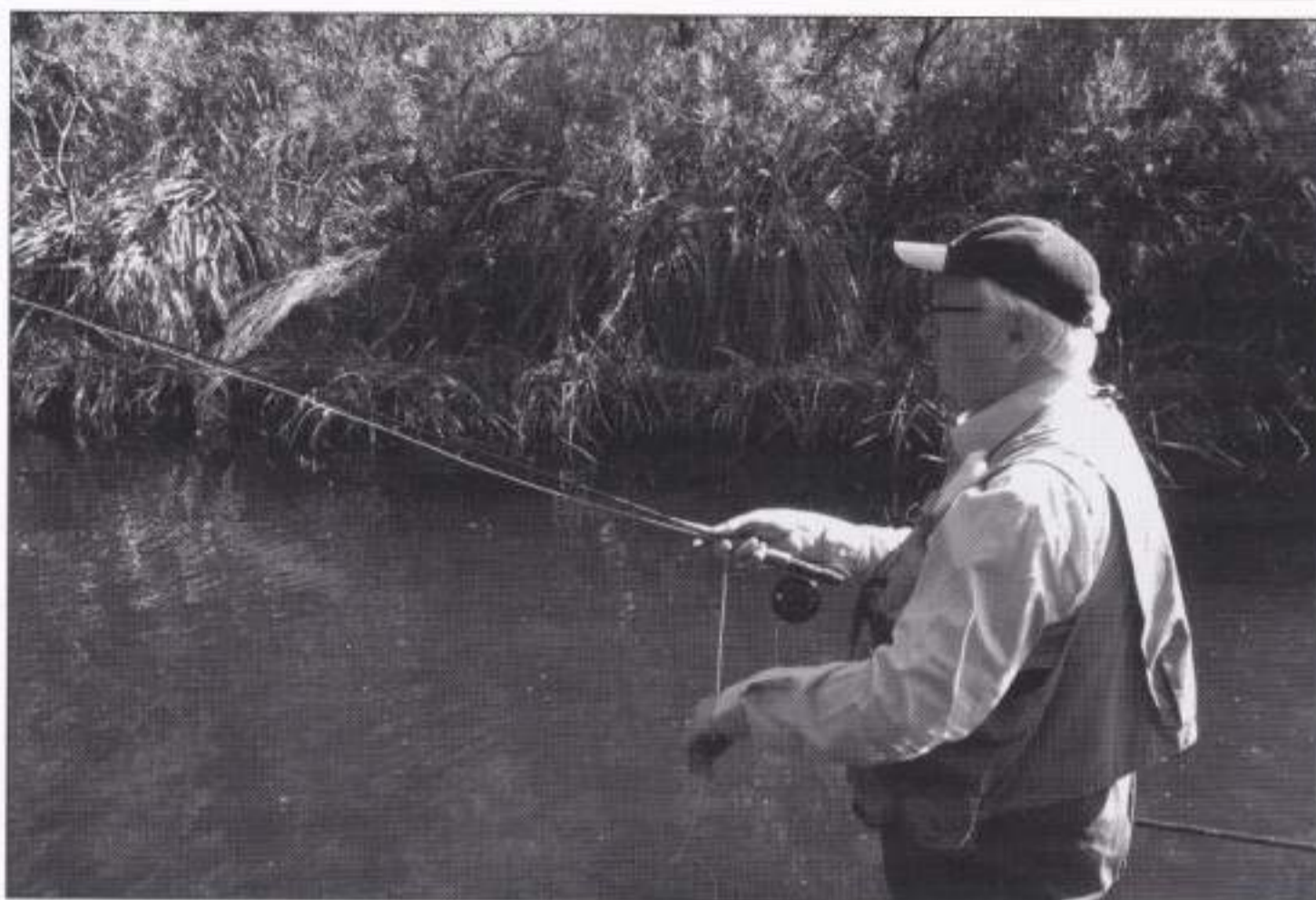
A few months later, Karel Krivanec contacted me about a friend of his, Jiri Pejchar. He explained that Jiri was a furniture designer and one of the organisers of the World Junior Fly Fishing Championship. Could he come and work in my furniture factory, help with the design of new ranges and improve his English? I was quick to agree. Many of the countries participating in the World Fly Fishing Championship have competition leagues and Jiri was a member of one of the teams competing in the first division of the Czech league. In the evenings Jiri would demonstrate fly tying techniques, discuss fly combinations and use the swimming pool to practise casting methods and test leader formulae. At weekends he would fish our streams, taking macro photographs of our aquatic insects and enlarging



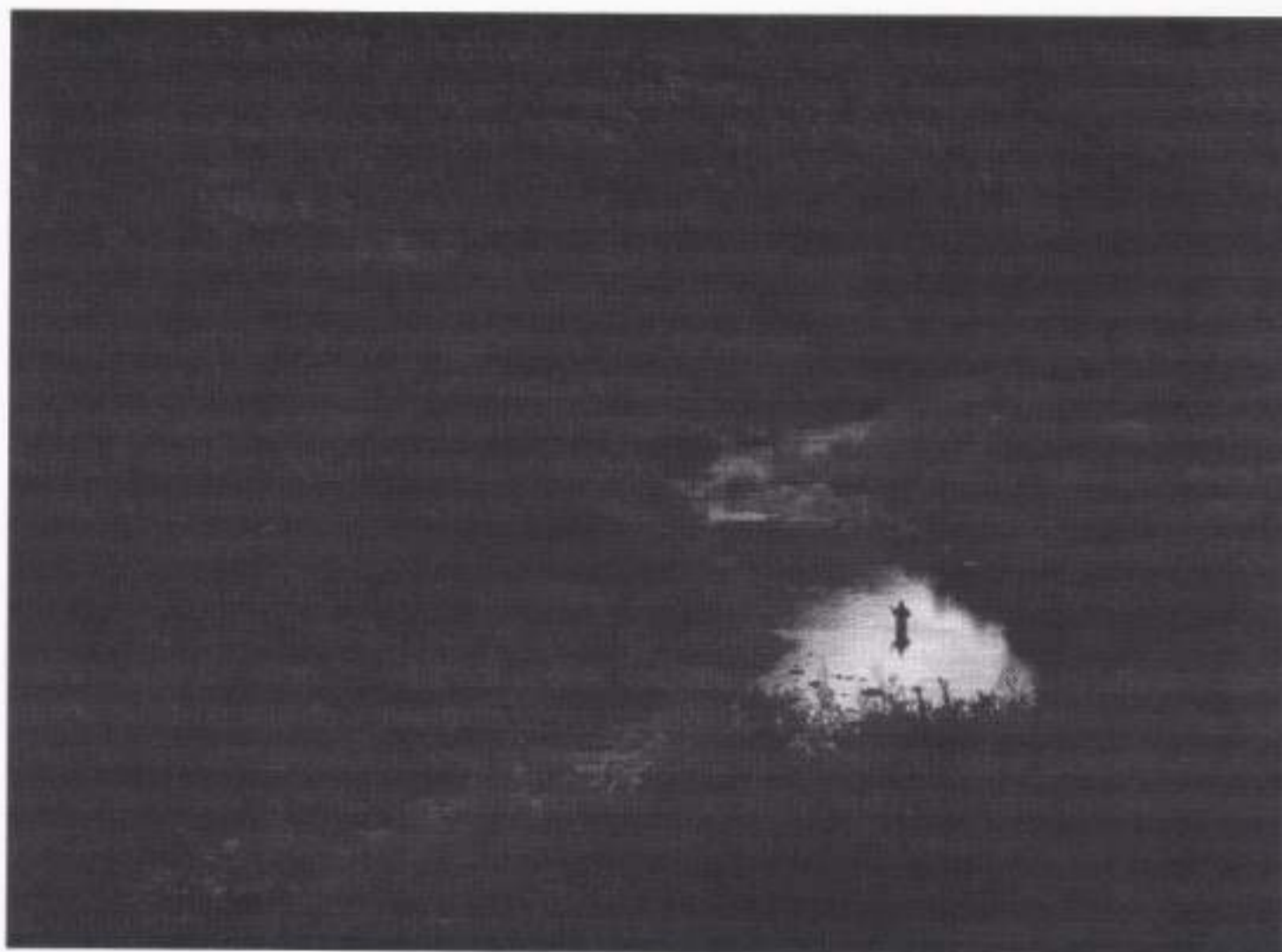
Korrie Broos watches Jiri Klima short line nymphing on the hotel beat of the Smalblaar during a spate.



Jiri Klima shows the editor how to produce a dubbing noodle in seconds during a visit to the CPS clubrooms in 2007.



*Karel Krivanec fishing the Holsloot on Ernst and Anchen Stofberg's farm, Dwarsberg.
Picture by Andrew Ingram*



*Jiri Klima fishing the evening rise on the Holsloot with two weighted micro-nymphs,
"Because that is how I prefer to fish!" Picture by Andrew Ingram.*

them on his computer monitor so that he could exactly replicate their colours in his dubbing mixes.

As Jiri Pejchar left, I was invited to visit the Czech Republic, and be the guest of honour at the World Junior Championship as well as an international controller. About a year later, I was on the plane to the Czech republic, to take Jiri Pejchar up on his offer, but also to avail myself of the open invitation that Jiri Klima and Karel Krivanec extended when they left South Africa: "If you ever visit the Czech Republic, our houses are as open to you as yours was to us."

While there, Jiri Klima showed me downstream nymphing techniques with soft hackled wet flies on fuller rivers. On the upper Vltava, Karel Krivanec showed me the advantages of the now further refined Czech-French nymphing methods. This technique is especially suited to more open, flatter rivers and very shy fish.

In a recent Skype conversation with Jiri Pejchar I said there were some South Africans who felt we had already reached the pinnacle of nymph fishing and that there was nothing new to learn or left to discover. He was astonished. "What? Here in the Czech Republic, we are learning every day more about nymphing, understanding every week more about the behavior of nymphs and the relationship between fish and nymphs. We feel we have only scratched the surface."

So, I guess, the quest continues to learn more to understand and attempt to master the wide variety of nymphing techniques that the FIPS-Mouche annual World Fly Fishing Championship has brought to the fore.

The efficacy of these techniques is now, however belatedly, being recognised by the manufacturers of fly rods. When I first started fly fishing fifteen years ago, the rod I was persuaded to buy was a Daiwa a 7ft 8 inches #5 weight. It was recommended to me as a good dry fly rod but I was never comfortable with it. I then bought a much longer rod, a 9ft White Wolf. Suddenly I felt more at home and, as Czech nymphing and its derivatives have become more popular, so the market has responded. Here is how Loomis describe their new Max Czech Nymph GLX range: "A unique fly rod series designed for a special style of tournament stream angling in Europe where speed and line control are paramount to success. These are extremely fast, 10-foot, 4-piece rods with light, sensitive tips to help anglers make short, accurate drifts with weighted nymphs. The technique requires very little in the way of traditional casting. Anglers actually flick weighted nymphs upstream of the target area and then, using the extra rod length, and long, light leaders, guide the flies along the bottom, almost pulling the rig downstream instead of using the standard 'dead-drift' technique. The extra-fast taper in these rods provides a quick hook-set, so anglers can react before the fish spits out the fly. The 3-weight is for smaller fish and protecting very light tippet. The 4-weight is for slightly heavier tippet and larger fish. The technique is quickly gaining a following in the U.S. as anglers discover new ways to fool pressure-sensitive trout."

Others are bound to follow and, in South Africa, the Greys Streamflex and Stealth Infinity (my personal favourite) ten foot 3-weights are increasingly being bought by fly fishers who want to improve their catch rates. (<http://www.stealth.co.za/>). Another book in the CPS

library which proved very beneficial to me was *The Masters on the Nymph* published as a paperback by Nick Lyons Books in 1985. It contained articles by legendary nymph fishers like Frank Sawyer, Dave Whitlock and Ernest Schweibert. I think the time is right for Volume Two, a book which will feature people like Edoardo Ferrero, Jiri Klima, Pascal Cognard, Vladi Trzebunia and Pier-Luigi Concito.

Craig Thom (<http://www.streamxflyfishing.co.za/>) has several outstanding books and DVDs on European nymphing techniques and I can particularly commend Karel Krivanec's aforementioned book as well as *Nymph-Fishing Rivers and Streams* by Rick Hafele (Stackpole Books) and *Czech Nymph* by Johan Klingberg in DVD.

Editor's note: At the end of April I spent a day on the lower Molenaars with Korrie and I learnt more in those few hours than I have in the equivalent number of previous years.

Before we even got to the water, Korrie had shown me how to don my waders so as to reduce water pressure and lower fatigue, a better way to sling my wading staff and how to avoid getting your rod tangled when making your way through streamside bushes and trees. All this was gold dust, little things that I wish I had known decades ago.

I was under the impression that the coiled mono indicator was fished lying horizontally on the water surface like a yarn indicator. I was wrong. Korrie fishes it hanging vertically, with just the bottom of the coil touching the water, if at all. In my nymph fishing I fish up the bubble line with an occasional cast to the bank if the presence of palmiet water reeds indicates a bit of depth or the possibility of an undercut. Korrie, in contrast, divides the stream into a grid and guides his team of nymphs round every underwater rock of size, the 10 foot rod enabling him to drift the 'slinky', which signals even the most subtle of takes, at the water surface and in tune with the current.

Some of the techniques he has learned from his international friends were a revelation to me, such as downstream surface nymphing with weighted flies and down and across searching with traditional winged wet flies like the March Brown.

It is not necessarily the way I want to fish and holding his 10 foot Stealth Infinity at arm's length, which Czech nymphing requires, was tiring. I do, however, want to learn more and I will be attending one of the clinics that Korrie will be holding in the coming year. I have also ordered an eleven foot, 2-weight blank from New Zealand fly rod manufacturers CTS, (<http://www.ctsfishing.com/>) This blank is not part of their normal range and has to be custom-built. It is being made up for me by my master rod builder, Mario Geldenhuis of Aliwal North (<http://www.customflyrods.co.za>). Unlike commercial fly rods this will have an all-cork reel seat to reduce weight and I will couple it with a carbon fibre, Vivarelli automatic fly reel (<http://www.francovivarelli.com/>). This combination, I hope, will give me Tenkara levels of fly control but with greater versatility. (<http://www.tenkarabum.com>).

By bringing world-class anglers like Edoardo Ferrero and Jiri Klima to this country at his own – and not insignificant – cost, Korrie Broos has made a significant contribution to the evolution of fly fishing in this country and, for this, he deserves the highest praise.