

A newcomer to the Smalblaar - 1962

A Mark Mackereth

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This being my first season of trout fishing in the Cape, it gives me great pleasure to record a few of my impressions of the delightful little river, the Smalblaar.

First of all, I consider it a first-class dry fly river, in fact all the trout I have taken there have been on the dry fly. What a glorious setting – whether one catches trout or otherwise! The Smalblaar is so reminiscent of some of the beautiful little Austrian mountain streams I had the good fortune to fish in 1959.

On my first visit to the Smalblaar the mountain peaks were snow-capped, with the river running rather high. Nevertheless, the water was very clear but the trout were reluctant to make an appearance – perhaps the reason being that, first and foremost, I am a dry-fly addict and persisted, hoping to get a rise. I have to admit I had a blank day as far as the trout were concerned, yet I thoroughly enjoyed myself in this most peaceful spot.

On the next occasion I found the trout rising beautifully. I had on my cast a Wickham's Fancy – this being one of my favourite flies on the Yorkshire rivers and one which I always used with great success. It was accepted at the first cast, and thinking the poor chap had made a dreadful mistake, I opened the stomach, which was full of black insects – beetles etc. (the names of which I am not aware). I changed my fly to a Black Spider – the nearest approach I had in my box to the contents of the stomach, but the fish were not interested. I changed back to a Wickham and was again accepted without hesitation. I had a bag of fine trout and also returned numerous smaller fish to the water.

On subsequent visits I have also been successful with the Wickham's Fancy, which seems to bear no resemblance to any insect on the water.

Some anglers seem to think that in such fast-running water, the trout take anything that comes their way. I hardly think this is the case because I have spent a great deal of time experimenting with a variety of dry flies.

Anyway, whatever the case may be, I hope fellow anglers will give the Wickham's Fancy a trial. "Tight Lines and Petri Heil!".

Editors note: If the trout were 'rising beautifully' as the author suggests, then it could be that they were rising to the ovipositing Baetis nigrescens females, a regular occurrence on our streams. In that case, the Wickham's Fancy, with its gold tinsel body shining through a palmered hackle, could have given a better impression of hovering mayflies than a Black Spider fished wet. Mark's enduring legacy is the Caribou Spider which remains one of the most effective dry flies ever.