

# A newcomer to the Smalblaar - 2010

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As an American, I didn't know what to expect from the fishing in South Africa. In fact, I didn't know what to expect at all from South Africa. The country does not show up in fancy ads in the angling magazines, nor does it make appearances on fly fishing destination videos. But I packed a 5wt rod just in case, because history has shown me that if the Queen has been there, she often brings along her trout. I was ecstatic to find out the Western Cape is blessed with a handful of crystal clear trout streams with free rising browns and rainbows amongst beautiful scenery.

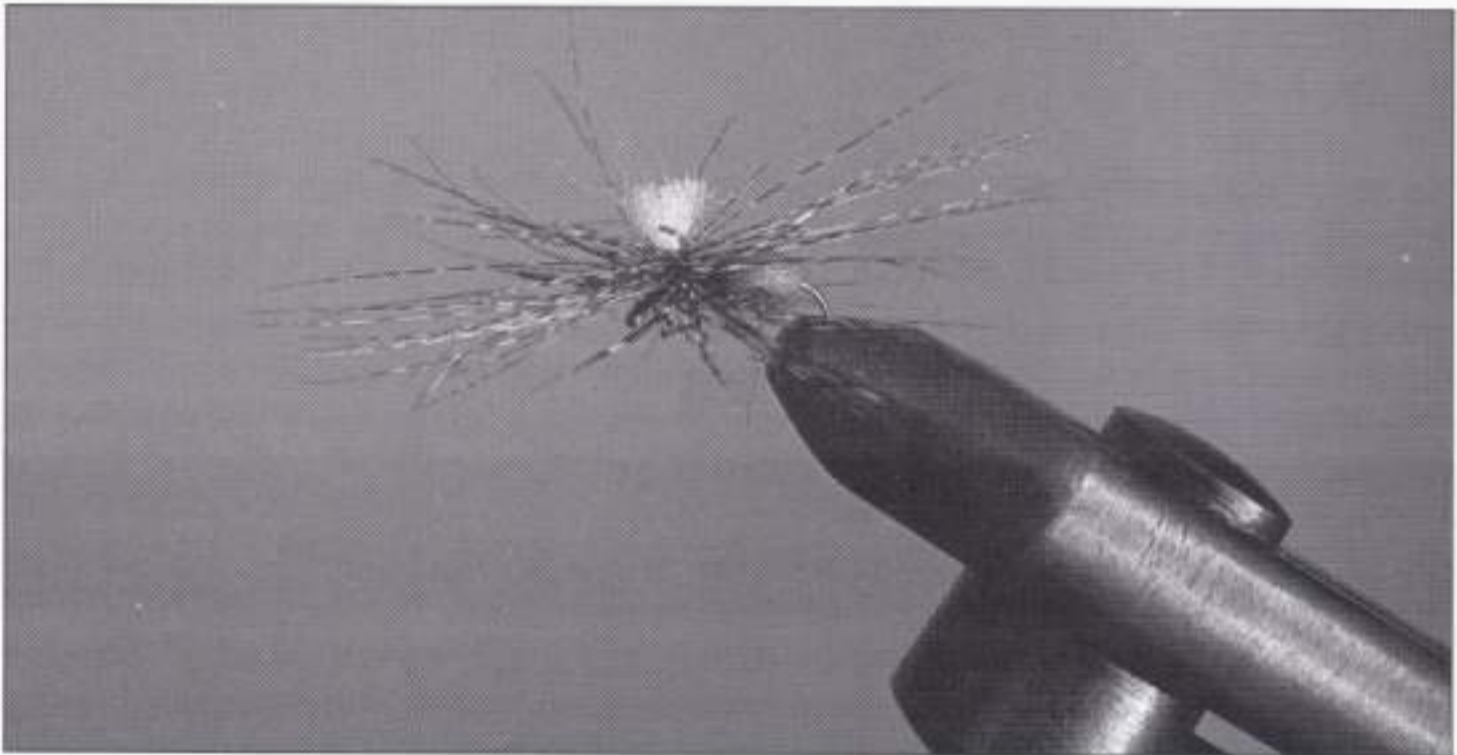
I remember my first day on the Cape streams like it was yesterday. Local angler Grant Keiser was kind enough to show me the ropes, and lend me a 3- wt rod. He didn't have an extra line though, so I made do with my reel loaded with a 5-wt line. We were fishing Beat 3 on the Smalblaar in September, and the water was high but clear. Being the gentleman he is, Grant allowed me first crack at the water, and immediately I was into a tidy 8 inch rainbow, a small but beautiful fish with perfect coloration. It was not the fishing I was used to, nor the size of fish I was used to, but I was in love immediately. While all this ran through my head, Grant had spotted a fish working the deep edge of the Weir Pool and seemed to have a purpose to his fishing. I soon learned why as he hooked a trout that ripped line from his reel and shot into a tree before I could blink. He lost that one, but we both knew it was a solid fish, and I was getting very excited now. We fished bigger dry flies in fast water most of the day, and took several trout each, nothing huge, but all very solid and well conditioned. At times during the day he assured me that, as this was early season with concomitant high water levels, the fishing would get better soon. I knew I was going to enjoy these streams.

I've spent many more days fishing the Cape streams since that first day with Grant, and he was right, it got much better. I do fish small streams back home, but they are a bit different to the small streams here. I suppose every stream is a little different, even the Elandspad and Smalblaar have personalities of their own. The Elandspad is a shallow, crystal-clear, well-behaved piece of water that enjoys showing off everything it has to offer. The Smalblaar, on the other hand, prefers to keep a few secrets hiding in deep runs or behind large boulders, and it's these very secrets that keep me coming back time and time again. But what I love most about both streams is that on any given day I can show up, and without thinking, tie on a size fourteen CDC and elk and take fish. The rainbows, and browns in this valley love to look up, and I love to watch them do so. Is there a greater moment in all of fly fishing than the expectations of a connection while a trout confidently but slowly rises to your dry fly?

Not only are the Cape streams ideally suited to fishing the dry fly, they are also the light gear aficionado's ideal playground. As the summer season progressed, the fish were transformed from naïve, opportunistic, mountain trout into something resembling well-educated, spring creek-style, selective feeders with a PhD in entomology. Under these conditions, landing fish goes from a given to a privilege, and only the stealthiest of approaches

and most natural of presentations will work. Short casts, long leaders, fine tippets, and predatory movement become the rule. Here the creative angler thrives, able to paint his fly over the multitude of micro currents, the goal being a natural, dead drift. Here the small stream angler becomes an artist more than a sportsman or woman. Under these conditions, when you find your fishing rhythm, you have good days. If you forget your focus, be prepared to go home with less fish than you'd like.

After a full season on the Cape streams, I've watched some great friends catch some wonderful trout from 19cm to 19 inches. I've witnessed mayflies hatch from size 20 to size 12. I've seen flyfishers, including myself, learn and grow as anglers and people. I have had amazing days catching more than 30 fish and frustrating days catching three fish. I've been forced to improve my spotting and stealth on the stream, and enhance my presentation skills. The Cape streams have been the ideal companion through my first year in Africa. And of course I have a favorite beat. Fish with me next season and I will show you.



*These two patterns developed by the author for local conditions, a Wolf Spider variation (top) and a RAB-type Variant, cover all conditions from slow-flowing flats to boisterous riffles and pocket water. The variant has a Coq de Leon hackle and the spider combines a CDL and partridge hackle.*

