

## BEWARE OF THE KLOOFS

By Robin Fick

Recent exploring has brought kloof clambering back into perspective for me. Being someone who prefers fishing on his own, enjoying solitude far from the madding crowd, one gets a little confident if nothing goes wrong for a while and one tends to venture further into the depths of our fold mountains. A couple of incidents might be worth relating so that you boulder hopping maniacs out there take heed.

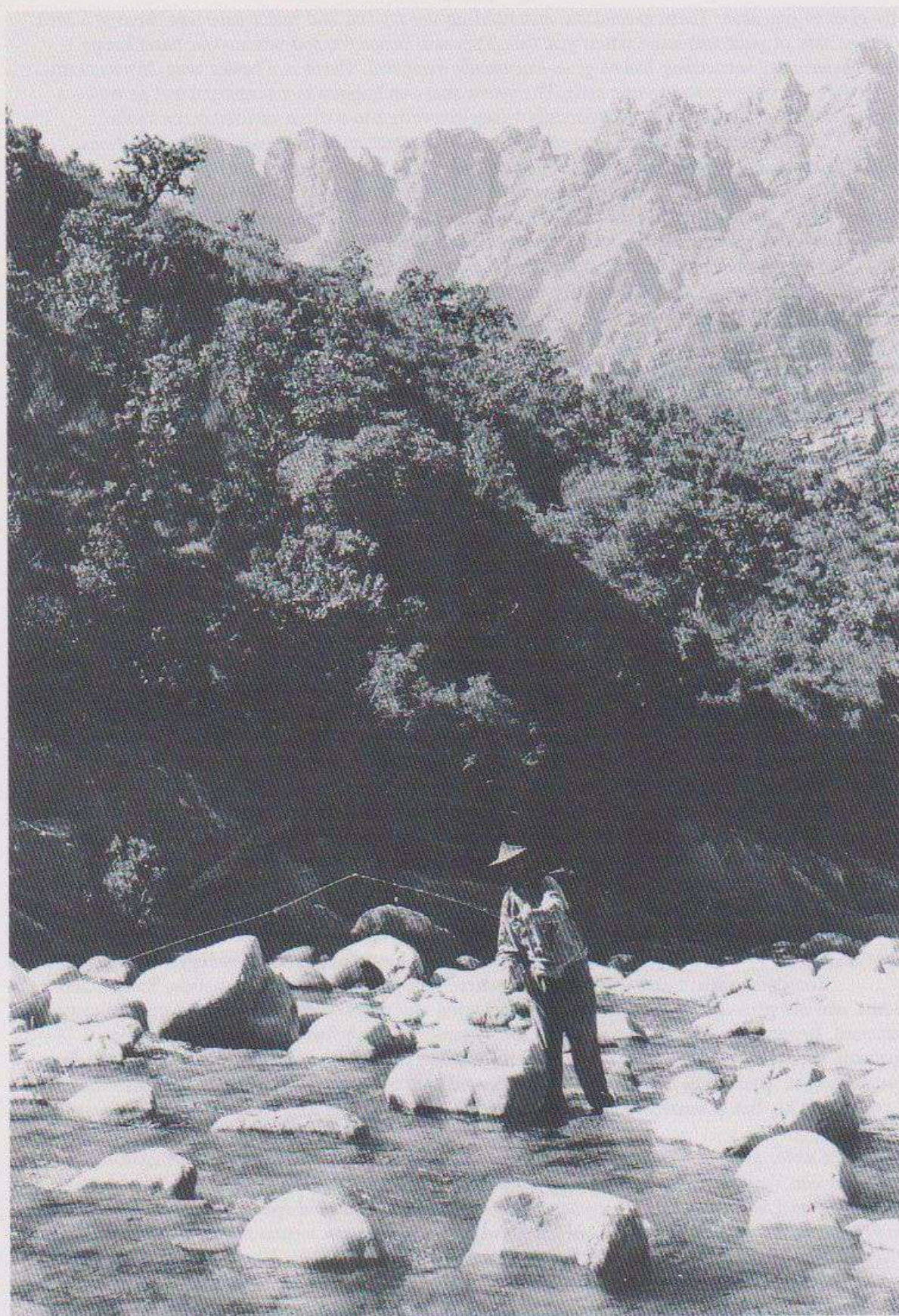
Firstly, when entering a kloof, never rely on anyone else, ie go in fully prepared with the correct equipment and the knowledge that only helicopters can reach you in time if you have a problem. If you are alone, advise someone of your exact whereabouts and the time you expect to be back. Dead bodies do not communicate where they are lying, and searching helicopters often cannot reach inaccessible spots like narrow kloofs and swims. Rather than going alone, it makes far more sense to accompany an experienced kloofer who knows the way.

Earlier this season I was alone, some 6 to 7kms from the car, with the fishing being so absorbing that I failed to notice that I was encroaching on a troop of baboons. It was quite obvious that no one had been this way for a while and my invasion of their territory led to an incredible performance of barking, stone throwing and boulder rolling. Needless to say, discretion was the better part of valour and I retreated post haste down the kloof to the safety of my vehicle and civilisation.

Bushwhacking our way out of another kloof, a friend and I set off a swarm of bees which sent us straight into the river making like a clinger-type Mayfly nymph. We could not shake them off until we were 200 m downstream. Being semi-allergic to their stings, I was terrified but luckily was only stung twice. The only real damage was a pair of polaroid sunglasses which were brushed off my face and ended up in pieces.

We all lose our footing in rivers so the motto is: keep as near to the surface of the river as possible so that you have the least distance to fall. High boulder jumping should be kept to a minimum. It can result in a twisted ankle or worse. Remember, you need two functioning legs to walk out of the mountains. The wrong way to fall has been demonstrated in front of me on several occasions. First; find a loose rock and place your foot on it off-centre. The foot slips and the





*Fishing the kloofs is fun, but go fully prepared with the correct equipment and the knowledge that only helicopters can reach you in time if you have a problem.*



body goes to one side. Then, extend the arm holding the fly rod and make sure that there is a rock on either side of your rod-hand when you fall. This will brace the rod while your hand keeps going. Eventually something has to give – normally your rod. There is a better way. If you stumble, throw or drop your rod to one side. The worst that can happen is a scratched rod or reel – a better option than a two-piece rod suddenly being converted to a three- or four-piece model.

Equally important is the correct choice of footwear and waffle-soled running shoes provide an excellent grip on the smooth riverbed stones in the Western Cape.

On a recent trip I saw another painful way of landing and this lad did it twice in one morning. As he lost his footing, he held on to his rod and tried to break his fall with his elbow. Unfortunately, on each occasion there was a rock available as the first contact point. Eventually his elbow was swollen like a tennis ball – a real case of fly rod elbow!

Clambering around water falls and through plunge pools can also surprise the unwary. I pulled a large boulder on to my leg while doing this. All movement led to further sliding and flattened fingers as I tried lift the rock. Only by wedging a handy piece of driftwood under the rock was I able to free myself. My companion, although close, could not hear my shouts for assistance due to the roar of the river.

Catwalks can also endanger the careless. A visiting fisherman found himself clinging to a tree after losing his footing on the Witels river. Rod in one direction and both hands around the tree trunk suspended above the river ...

Sand on your shoes when boulder hopping is another, very literal, pitfall to avoid. After centuries of being rolled around and abraded during winter floods, some rocks in our Western Cape rivers are as smooth as glass and, combined with sandy shoe soles, provide a lethal combination. If moving upstream requires boulder hopping rather than wading, first wash the sand off your shoes.

Extremes of weather can also occur unexpectedly. Being in a narrow confine, you are often unaware of an advancing cold front or storm. It just sweeps over the escarpment and, unexpectedly, the temperature drops 10 degrees and it is pouring. No matter how warm and sunny the day when you start, you have no guarantee that it is going to stay that way. It is absolute folly not to carry a thermal vest and a lightweight rain jacket. Furthermore, a solar blanket weighs only a few grams and has saved lives when people have been trapped in the mountains by bad weather. You lose most of your body heat through your head so a woolly hat or balaclava is another lightweight item which could prove vital.

At the other extreme, dehydration and sunburn also take their toll. The river is full of crystal clear water and a timeous drink will help you avoid dehydration.

Make sure you are protected from the sun. While concentrating on your fishing it is all too easy to ignore the warning signs but you will pay the price in years to come – in some cases, skin cancer can prove fatal. Wearing a peaked cap or a broad-brim hat shades your eyes, cuts glare and helps you spot fish in addition to the protection it affords from the sun. Wetting the cap or hat from time to time keeps you cool which, in turn, helps you conserve energy.

Remember also to be vigilant about where you place your feet and hands. Snakes and spiders are not pleasant to grab hold of or tread upon and most of them object – normally to your detriment. Because running water removes the vibrations which forewarn a snake of your approach, it pays to give the bushes a good shaking and careful scrutiny when you leave the river after wading it. There will be people who mock or disparage your caution but remember – chicken you might be, but at least live chickens can walk out of a kloof and return to enjoy it again!

■ **Editor's note:** Members fishing our mountain kloofs should refer to "Not Quite A Fishing Trip" by Marius van Tonder (Page 31, Piscator July 1992) for a reminder of how quickly the weather can change and how easily such weather changes can lead to people dying. While running shoes can provide good grip on the rocks, their lightweight construction means they provide very little protection, particularly in the toe area. The latest generation of hiking boots and the Beier Bova boot worn by our police force provide a good combination of grip and protection. Purpose-built, felt-sole wading shoes provide excellent grip while wading but are potentially dangerous on smooth, sand-covered rocks.

This article was previously carried in "The Leader", monthly journal of the Fly Fishers Association of Durban and is carried with their permission.





*Stealth is the secret of success ... Tom Sutcliffe on the Rifle Spruit near Barkley East*