

A RIVER NAMED KWAAI

Gerard Barnardt

From the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains, flows a stream as clear and pristine as the morning dew. On first sight it brings both excitement and total inner tranquillity to the toughest of flyfishermen. Excitement is stirred by the prospect that it might hold some browns, which are confirmed by previous reports, although a flyfisherman seldom believes without feeling a tug on the line. Tranquillity is achieved by the peaceful surroundings of the setting, which is magnified by the stream's plain beauty.

Merely a good leap apart in most spots, the stream is small in every way, but having seen beyond its size, one is quickly reminded of its deep undercuts where browns are known to hide and feed to their hearts' delight. Looking at the stream through my mind's eye, I can still recall the dry fly drifts along the undercuts, in the prospect of seeing it disappear in the break of the surface from a hungry brown.

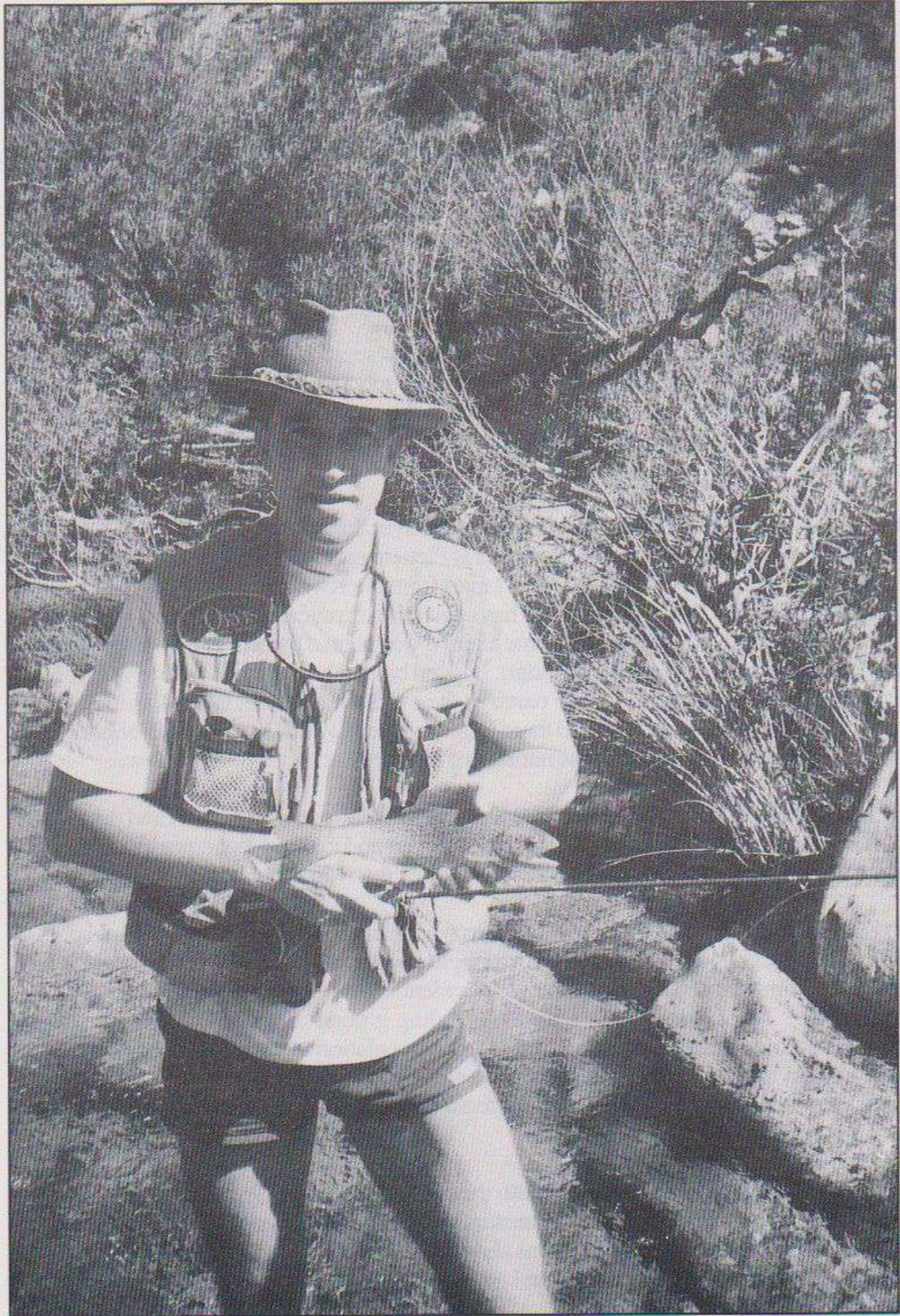
The stream is a tributary to famous Keurbooms River that springs in the Little Karoo and works its way towards its union with the sea at Plettenberg Bay. By famous, I mean it is the only river that contains trout in that area (apart from the Kwaai). It enters the Keurbooms at a place called De Vlugt, a name that has something mystical about it. The origin of the name remains a mystery, although some claim it was named by people escaping the Boer War (the Dutch word for escape is Vlugt). Legend has it that you don't have to wait for the dark of night to see ghosts in those parts, as they walk in daytime. Be that as it may, the only ghosts I have ever encountered there were the slim brown fishy ones with bright spots, that lay in ambush of the countless number of hatches that occurs on the Kwaai.

Although the Kwaai is a tributary to the Keurbooms, they are worlds apart and the Kwaai is more hospitable. Not only is its water crystal clear and ice cold, but it possesses just the right nutrient contents to boast a good strain of healthy wild browns.

The Kwaai has an almost perfect gradient drop and contains both pocket water and pools. It is your typical freestone stream, with a ripple-pool configuration. On top of that it has patches of limestone, which become very evident when looking at the grass growth on some rocks. These grass patches are the breeding ground of a wide variety of aquatic insects. Not only does the stream contain a good population of caddis flies, apart from the obvious mayflies, but it also contains brown stoneflies. The stoneflies aren't big, but their presence alone is testament to a healthy stream which, in this decade of dumping waste, is rather reassuring.

There is a saying that you never step into the same stream twice which, in a way, is what this stream is all about. It changes constantly, even on the same day. One hatch might follow another, which might end just as abruptly as it started. There are periods when you could swear there are no fish around and other times when you struggle to keep your hands calm long enough to tie on a fly.

We all know, either by first hand experience or the written word on the subject, that browns are difficult to take. If this has been your experience, you will appreciate the difficulty in



New CPS chairman, Gerard Barnardt with a brown trout from the Kwaai River.

trying to predict the thoughts of a brown.

The browns of the Kwaai are past masters at human psychology and they will rack your brains and play with your mind every time you cast upstream. If you have never experienced the cunning ways of a brown, consider yourself lucky as you will have the best chance of success.

This stream has made up its own set of rules and if you are not prepared to lay down everything and start from the bottom, then expect to be skunked the first time, as you have to tackle this stream with a fresh perception. Having said that, they are not uncatchable, albeit few. The point is, expect things to change and don't get used to one discipline, as you will need them all and a couple of new ones to tempt them to take.

For the purist this is the ultimate stream, as browns were never stocked there, but made their way up from initial stockings in the Keurbooms a long time ago. Along with the browns, some rainbows have followed suit upstream which resulted in a good population of wild rainbows that fight like the hounds of hell.

The owner, Chris Kastern, wants to keep a no-stocking policy to keep the stream celibate and untouched by humans. This is especially desirable from a conservation point of view, as the stream boasts a good population of redfin minnows.

Fishing this stream is a real privilege and if the planned development goes ahead, this limit experience may be limited to a few lucky souls. In short, the plan is to sell about 12 plots of land for development and run the fishing separate which, depending on the joint owners' decision, might mean that no day visitors are allowed. Maybe it is time to take a trip to the bank and have a hearty talk with the bank manager, about being one of the few who will have the concession of drifting a fly on the Kwaai.

