

DDD day at Inhluzane

Neil Hodges

“The DDD ... has accounted for many of the largest trout taken on dry flies from our stillwaters.” Dean Riphagen, The South African Fly-Fishing Handbook (New Holland, 1998).

The news that a story from Tom Sutcliffe's books, *Hunting Trout, The lakes at Inhluzane* has been selected by US publisher Nick Lyons as one of the best fishing stories ever written is welcome.

It is contained in the anthology, *The Best Fishing Stories Ever Told*, by Nick Lyons and David Halberstam, Skyhorse Publishing, 2011, and its selection is a justifiable tribute to South Africa's pre-eminent fly fishing writer.

But the lakes at Inhluzane, in the Dargle district of Natal and in the foothills of the Drakensberg mountain range, were significant for another reason.

In an article posted on Tom's website, www.tomsutcliffe.co.za, *Piscator's* editor, Ed Herbst, has postulated that South Africa's two 'flies of the century' are the late Theo van Niekerk's TVN nymph and Tom Sutcliffe's DDD because each changed a mindset - the TVN that yellowfish could not be caught on fly and the DDD that dry flies had no place on dams.

The DDD evolved in the mid seventies and, initially, it looked like a Rat Faced McDougal without the hackle tip wings. It was Hugh Huntley, Tom's best friend and a member of the syndicate that fished at Inhluzane, who substituted the hackle with a collar of Klipspringer hair and used the same material for the tail rather than hackle fibres.

These changes not only made the fly float better and for longer but created a genuine indigenous pattern.

The efficacy of the DDD on dams took some time to register. As Tom revealed in his second book, *Reflections on Flyfishing*, it was Bill Duckworth, who also fished dams in the Dargle and was given a few DDDs to try, who brought this fly to the attention of a wider audience. News of his success spread rapidly and the fly soon won new converts.

"Bill fished it with such energy, enthusiasm and obvious success that we all sat up and took notice. From then on it became known as Duckworth's Dargle Delight." (*Legend of the DDD*).

The article included an electron microscope photograph of a cross section of a Klipspringer hair and it showed the internal compartments which make the fly float so well - the Klipspringer being the only African antelope that features such hair.

The effectiveness of the DDD was graphically illustrated one weekend in 1991 when the then British ambassador to South Africa, Sir Robin Renwick, joined us.



Sir Robin Renwick with the trout he caught on a DDD at the Inhluzane dams.

Tom Sutcliffe received a call from the consulate in Durban saying that Sir Robin would like to fish and could he assist.

Sir Robin fitted in well at the cottage on the syndicate, enjoying and contributing to the badinage and companionship of like-minded souls united in the wish to, however momentarily, escape the tensions and hurly burly of the working week.

He caught several fish but nothing of consequence until the last day of his stay and thereby hangs a tale.

One of the dams at Inhluzane was called 'Trophy Dam' and for good reason. Hugh Huntley had stocked it with very few trout to reduce the competition for the available food and it contained fish which sometimes reached double figures,

Early on the Monday morning, Sir Robin fished for an hour or so and then jumped into his car for the trip to Durban. He was still wearing his waders but his plan was to change at the consulate and then catch a flight to Cape Town. He parked his car next to Trophy Dam and walked over to say goodbye just as Hugh, his Orvis Limestone already rigged with a DDD, spotted a big trout patrolling a circular beat alongside a weed bed and just next to a drop-off.

He handed Robin the rod as the big trout swam ever closer. The tension in the air was palpable. The trees grow close to the dam wall and the regulars have learnt that a slight wrist cant keeps your fly away from them but Sir Robin, as a newcomer, was not to know of such niceties. The fly was retrieved but the next cast lodged the fly firmly in Tom's jersey.

By now the trout had turned and was making its way back towards us, turning slightly, right and left, as it sucked in hapless insects mired in the surface film.

Sir Robin's third cast was right on the money, landing just centimetres in front of the advancing trout which sucked in the DDD with the studied nonchalance of a fish which was not only lord of its domain but which had been thoroughly duped.

Hugh Huntley had always advocated waiting until a rising trout had turned away before one struck and advocated saying: "God save the Queen", to allow the requisite time to elapse before drawing home the steel.

Her Majesty's envoy did not repeat this mantra but the fish was nevertheless firmly hooked and it reacted with an explosive leap which it then repeated twice more before racing away from us with a surge which had the reel handle spinning and the leader stretched taut.

There was bedlam as a cacophony of advice filled the air but Hugh, cool as the proverbial cucumber, deftly netted the big trout and administered the last rites. "We'll get it mounted for you", he said and Sir Robin needed no second bidding, running down the bank, jumping into his car and heading towards Durban in a cloud of dust. He made the plane with only minutes to spare, fortunately not in his waders as he had had time to change at the British consulate in Durban first.

The trout was handed to me and I had it mounted before flying to Cape Town with the trout on my lap. I had firmly rejected the suggestion at the check-in counter that it be placed in the hold and my travelling companion certainly occasioned a lot of comment.

It was handed over at a lunch at the British Embassy in Bishopscourt and was to accompany Sir Robin in his subsequent posting to America as British ambassador to the Reagan administration and it now hangs in his office in London where he is vice chairman of J P Morgan bank.