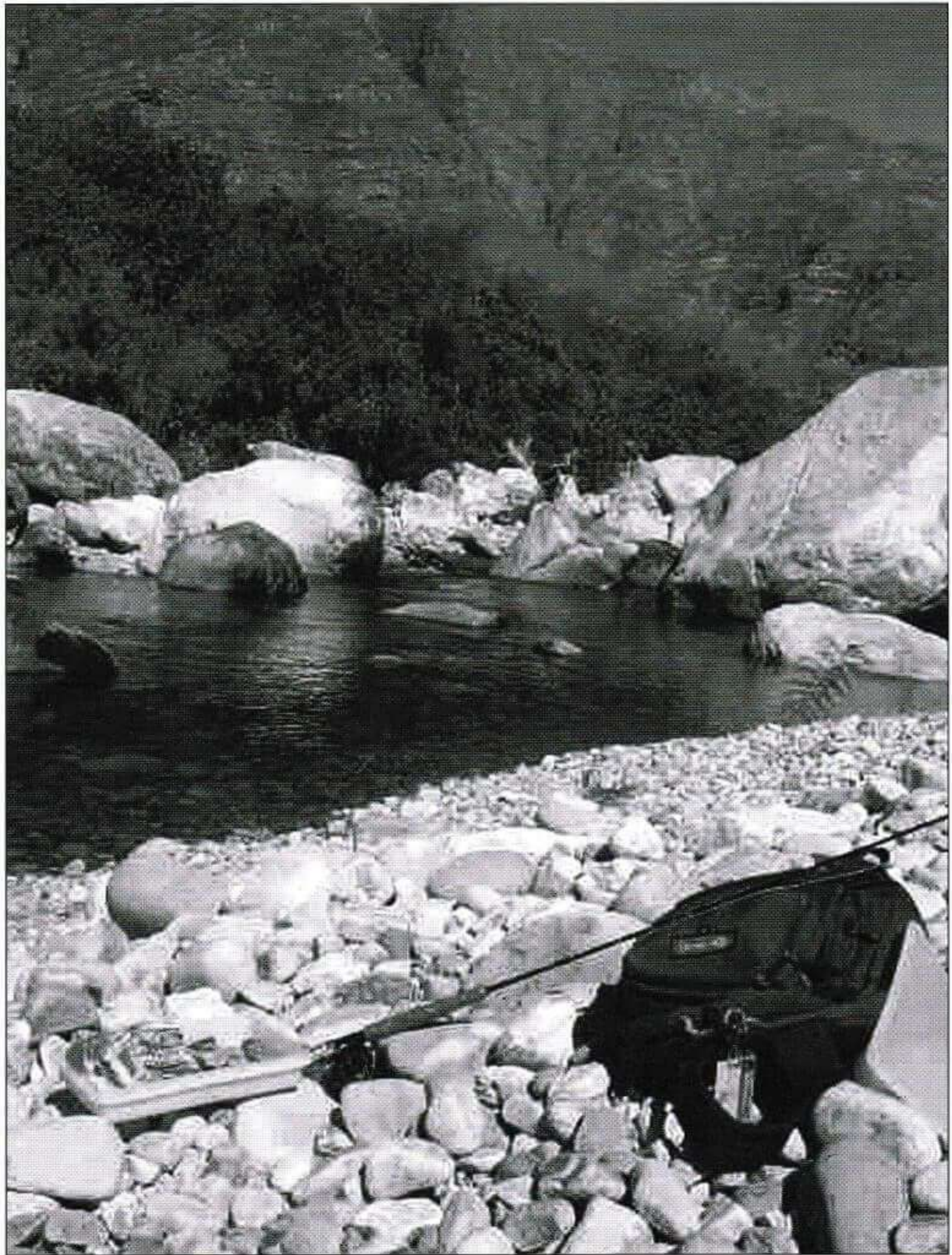




Otter country - the spot on the Molenaars where the author photographed the otters.

Safari on the stream

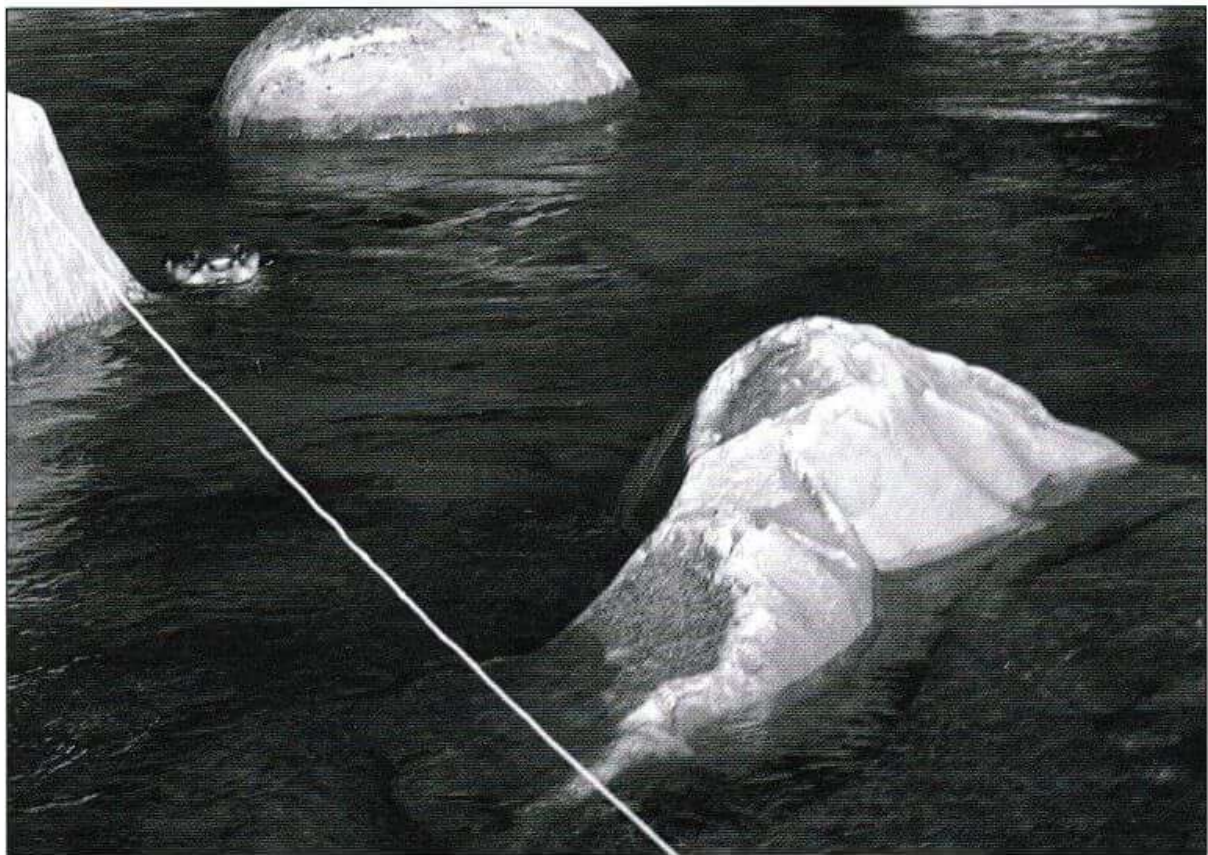
Michael Hainebach

I saw movement in the river upstream. Concentrating and in 'technical fishing mode', my brain flipped through the variety of explanations suggested by the visual clues ...on the surface - size of small duck - roughly geometric patterns - alternating colour ranging white, through pink to dark brown not enough info to compute.... what the ...?

.... Two beautiful Cape Clawless Otters came cruising down the river towards me in the crystal clear water. The fumbling extraction of my camera went unnoticed by the otters, which were too intent on finding a crab or luckless fish. The rising sun behind me was probably my saving grace.

It was almost scary as a stocky head swam down the river, straight towards me. It searched around a boulder, an arm's length away (you'll notice my fly line in some of the pictures), writhing and snaking in and out of holes at the base. The second joined in and soon popped up a metre away from me. Our eyes met for what must have been two seconds – although it felt considerably longer - and they were gone!

When I reached the next pool a hundred metres upstream, I scanned the bouldered depths for signs of fish. My eye caught a movement and zeroed in ... bubbles?... bubbles??... the lithe shape of the otter materialised as it moved through the rapid into a



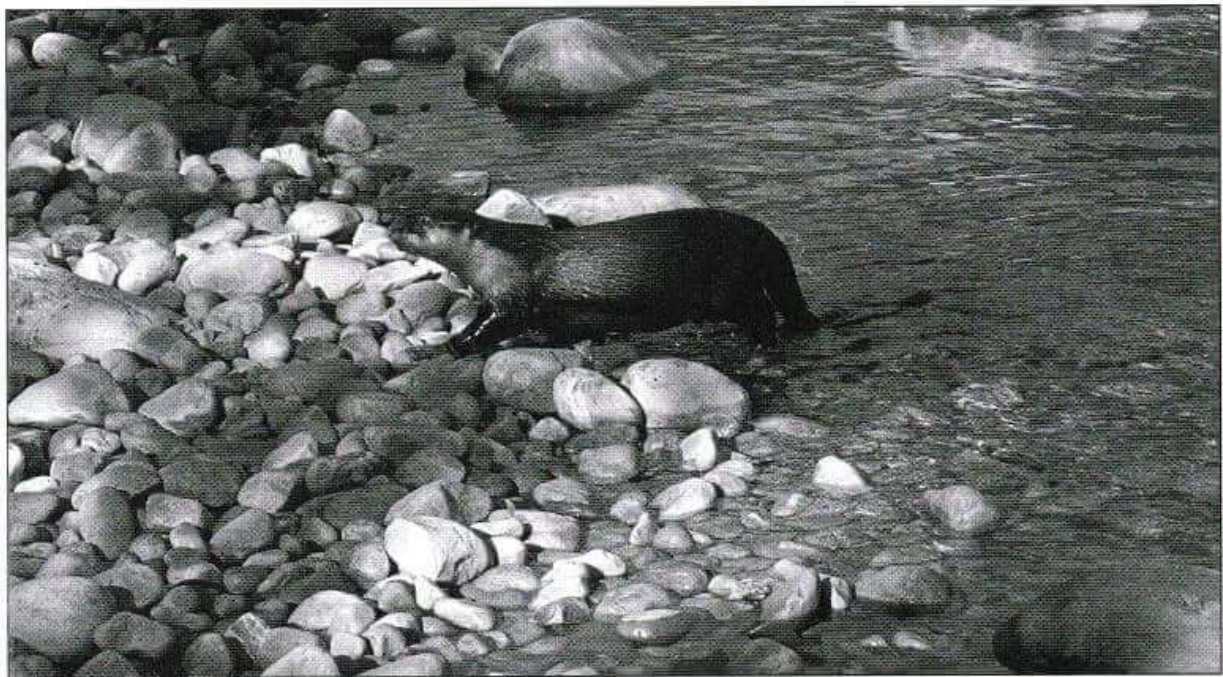
The first sighting of the Cape Clawless Otters.



The curious animal gets closer ...

calmer area. The two were, once again, snaking around the bottom, poking their noses into any hole that beckoned. Again a scramble for my camera ... bugger the waterproof bag ... after a thorough investigation of the bottom, one headed towards the bank not four metres from where I was standing with wobbly knees. It climbed out, paused and then turned and stared me down again. Dripping wet and sleek it crossed the rocks and ambled off into the riparian undergrowth. It was followed by its companion. My knees like jelly, I sat down to reflect ...

As fly fishers of the Cape streams, we are quite often presented with a wonderful safari moment like this, be it otters, snakes, ducks or a surprised couple sneaking in a romantic swim. They are not to be taken them for granted, few others have them.



... and, with its sleek coat glistening with water, makes the day of an enthralled fly fisher.