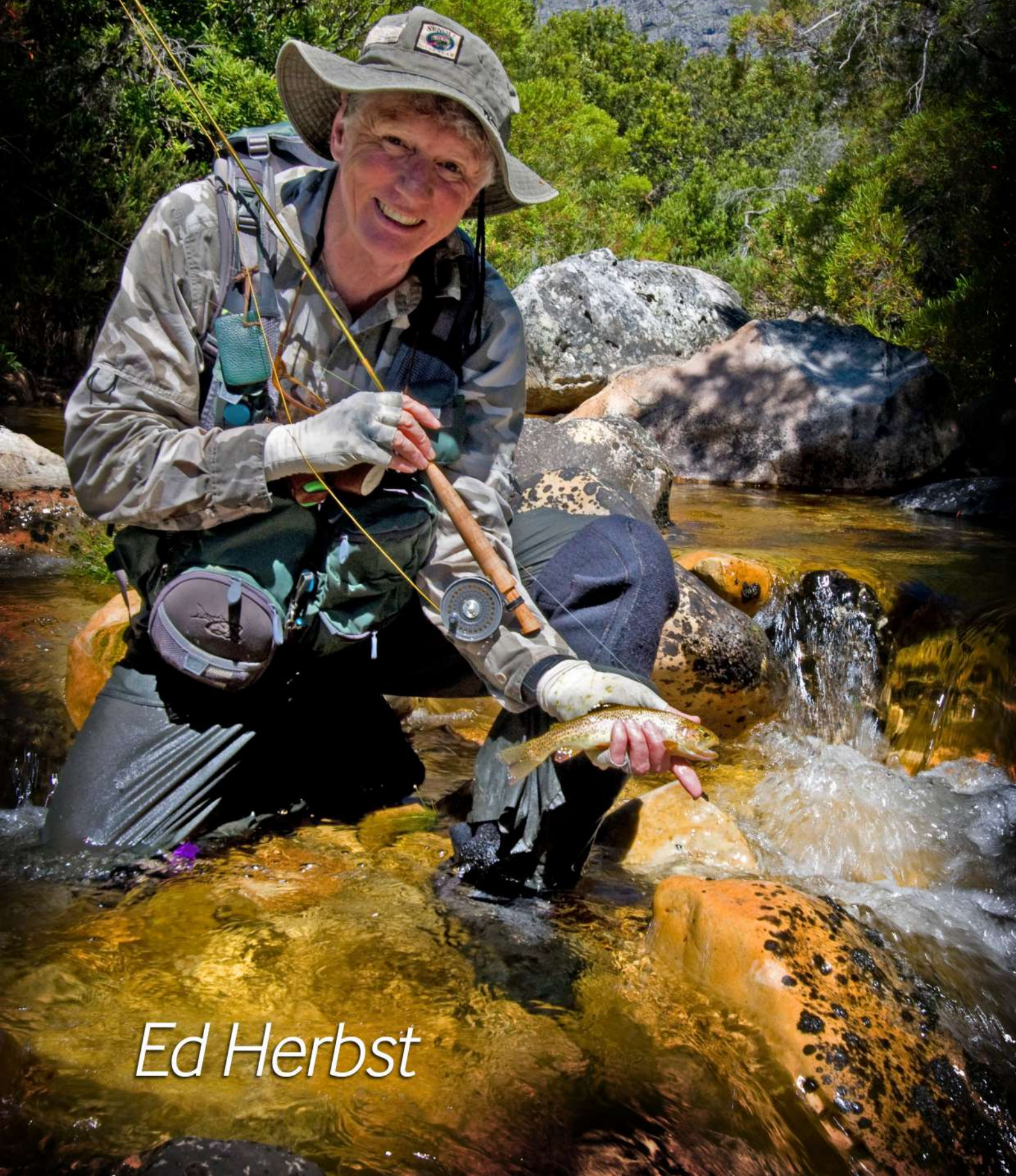


The Delicate Fly Fisher



Ed Herbst

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Author's Note

"You have a story to tell"

Gordon van der Spuy, fresh from the triumph of self-publishing 'Feather Mechanic' his personal approach to fly tying which was earning significant acclaim from expert and beginner alike, was visiting me in the retirement home where I lived in Cape Town, my fly angling days a decade behind me. I hesitatingly agreed, only too aware from my own library of the plethora and fly fishing and tying books extending across centuries.

What had I to offer which was new or would be of benefit to potential readers?

"You have an audience." Gordon said.

That was true in a way.

My one-sentence Instagram bio - @ed_herbst346 - read: 'Small stream enthusiast based in Cape Town and narrowly focused on delicate tackle and tiny flies' and, in little more than a year, I had gained close on one thousand five hundred followers from all over the world.

I had previously, with Peter Brigg, co-authored a book on significant South African trout flies which could be regarded as indigenous in terms of design, materials used and the local prey species they were designed to imitate.

It had done well locally but what did I have to offer an international audience of trout anglers?

By profession I am a news reporter and all the articles I had written over the past four decades had related to my own learning curve, my own journey in my chosen fly-fishing milieu – what Ernest Schweibert called 'The Song of the Little Stream'.

I was looking for what we all look for – the fly that would, with an accompanying sense of wonder, change a dour day into one filled with sunshine; the rod and reel that would relate to the title of this book, 'The Delicate Fly Fisher' and would compensate for my mediocre casting skills and less than adequate stalking ability, the fly tying vise and tools that would enhance my enjoyment and enable me to tie smaller and more delicate flies with more speed and greater dexterity.

I discussed the possibility of writing a book on small stream fly fishing with consummate split cane rod-building craftsman, Stephen Boshoff. He has walked the 'Delicate Fly Fisher' path with me and had, in fact, suggested the title of this book.

"You were there in the best of times", he said, stressing the importance of the historic chronology which I had helped bring to life as editor for a decade of *Piscator*, the journal of the Cape Piscatorial and, later, the digitising of its content over its 63-year lifespan on the CPS website – <https://www.piscator.co.za/CPS2/>.

As a television news reporter, you have 70 seconds – if you are lucky – in which to summarise complex events in a way which makes them coherent to your audience.

Pulling seemingly disparate threads together and distilling them into an essence is an acquired skill and perhaps that is where I can be of assistance to those seeking greater efficiency, success and enjoyment in a multi-faceted endeavour which enthralls commoners and kings.

Can I, from the knowledge gleaned in almost half a century of intense immersion in fly fishing books and magazines and my own experience in the small stream environment, help others benefit from my mistakes and discoveries?

Often, what I most recall after reading a book, is a defining element, a sentence or a fact or an experience of the author which I find intriguing, something worthy of further exploration.

The definitive book for me is *Trout from Small Streams* by Dave Hughes and what lived with me after reading it was his chapter 'Working Wet Flies' in which he speaks of a 'revelation' and 'an epiphany'.

It relates to an experience on a hot summer day when he was fishing a crystal staircase stream in Oregon. Trout were splashing at but not taking his usually successful dries. What did work were size 10 - 12 soft hackles such as the Partridge and Yellow. Suddenly previously-reticent trout were competing for his fly and he put this down to what he called the 'umbrella posture' of the fly in the water.

My experiments, successful for me, in seeking to replicate this design feature, resulted in what I called the Slipknot Emerger.

It combines fly design features gleaned from Vincent Marinaro, Frank Sawyer and John Goddard and is used with the Surgeon's Swivel, a knot popularised by Art Lee, along with the greased leader approach recommended by Tom Rosenbauer and Peter Hayes.

It emphasises essential elements which characterise successful trout fly design - movement, contrast and vulnerability - and it contains one hotspot, although the further I move into the realms of provoking a trout to take the fly through curiosity or aggression rather than deceiving it into seeing it as a potential food item, the less comfortable I become.

'Equipment is the only thing' is a chapter in Gary Borger's stellar instructional book, *Presentation*, and I was to discover that the hard way on my first day as a fly angler in the spring of 1978.

The Western Cape is a winter rainfall region and the water was still high and cold when I stepped into the stream wearing running shoes. As a slim and wiry person, I have little resistance to the cold and, after falling several times, I realised that I needed to get proper wading shoes. I also wanted others to avoid my experience and that is what motivated my writing thereafter.

The *Delicate Fly Fisher* is also a life story, of a friendship that resulted in two life-saving medical interventions, of a political struggle against a bureaucratic ideology which sees trout as an environmental threat rather than an employment-creating asset while ignoring the impact of habitat destruction.

That, in turn, saw the emergence of the Federation of South African Fly Fishers, FOSAF, the local equivalent of similar lobby groups elsewhere in the world such as Trout Unlimited and The Grayling Society.

In 2021 FOSAF achieved a court victory with momentous political significance because it challenged the de facto approach to the promulgation of legislation in South Africa. Government, with its deep pockets, filled by the taxpayer, has appealed the ruling.

It is also the story of the Cape Piscatorial Society and how our colonial forbears overcame enormous financial and logistical challenges to establish a trout fishery in a hot and arid country.

Fly fishing in the colonies was much influenced by the Victorian heritage but, over time, evolved with local knowledge and experience to provide an indigenous body of knowledge from which fly anglers and tyers elsewhere in the world can benefit.

When I joined the CPS in 1978 and acquired previous issues of its journal, *Piscator*, I came across an article 'Lilliput Water' by Peter Turnbull-Kemp which left me entranced and defined my fly-fishing aspirations from then on. It described his fishing with the Leonard Baby Catskill – the forerunner to my mind of the current 'Whisper' rods - and it left me with a longing to replicate its lightness and delicacy.

I have, because of its influence on me, included that article in the beginning of this book.

If, at the end of it, you walk away with the thought that it has provided you with an interesting and entertaining read and ideas for further exploration, then it will have succeeded in its purpose.



Dedications

To the Cape Piscatorial Society which has enriched my life for almost half a century

To my late mother, Helena, whose memory I revere

To Tom Sutcliffe, friend and mentor

To Stephen Boshoff, superb craftsman, who accompanied me on the search for the ultimate small stream fly rod

To Peter Brigg, co-author and proofreader who cherishes the small stream ethos

To Sunet Terblanche who helped me create the Cape Piscatorial Society's literary archive

To Andrew Ingram, the creative force behind the two-DVD Vimeo series 'A South African Fly-Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends'

To Gordon van der Spuy – the 'Feather Mechanic' – for persuading me to write this book.

To the Wild Trout Association in Rhodes and Barkly East whose members provided me with memorable friendship, hospitality and fly-fishing

To Hannes Thiart and his wife Barbara Mueller whose publishing skills brought this project to fruition.





CHAPTER 1

Early Milestones

From goldfish to mountain streams

“*t's in the fishing that does it for most of us, not just the catching or the keeping. The reading of the water, the awareness of the environment, the pleasure of the open spaces, the preparation and the anticipation. So many facets come together from tying flies, to reading and acquiring knowledge, to practising the craft and the repetition of the doing, until it becomes enshrined muscle memory that happens without thought or conscious endeavour and just happens mostly as you hoped or intended it to. Believing in a future means that we cherish what we have and believe in and steward this so that we hopefully can leave it in a better state for those coming after us to enjoy and benefit from. Many of us feel the urge to share this pursuit with others who feel likewise and with the next generations. Long may it be so. I live in hope that our legacy will inspire others.”*

Ilan Lax, National Chairman of the Federation of South African Fly Fishers (FOSAF), December 20121

One of my earliest recollection was being taken, aged about five years, by my widowed mother on a bus to the Durban harbor to where a ferry departed for the far side of the bay every few hours. She had bought me a rod and reel from her meagre earnings as a typist and I caught a rock cod. I don't know why she did that, perhaps it was because of the interest I had displayed when she told me about fishing during her childhood in a country village, but there were no further trips because she could not afford the bus fare.

I then discovered goldfish in ponds in a park near my home, but using a rod would quickly attract the attention of the park attendant. I would visit the park with bread and chum the goldfish. Having attracted their attention, I would throw a twig into the water attached to which was a short section of nylon mono and a small hook baited with bread. I would watch with delight as the twig zig-zagged around the pond while scanning the park for the attendant. Had he approached, I would have nonchalantly strolled away, but he never did and, after retrieving the twig, the goldfish would be released.

A few years later I found an American magazine, Rod & Gun, at a local book shop and came across an article about the angling adventures of Dwight Eisenhower as a youth. I was enthralled and my mother bought the magazine for me. I could do that, I could be like them.

I started bait fishing rivers and later graduated to spinning for bass in farm dams. I continued to voraciously read American magazines such as Outdoor Life and Sports Afield and Field & Stream but it was only when I was in my mid-thirties that I was able to realise my ambition to start fly fishing.

My employer, the South African Broadcasting Corporation transferred me as a television news reporter and camera operator to Cape Town in 1978 and I joined the Cape Piscatorial Society which

traces its origins to 1906.

I became a committee member and then editor of its annual journal *Piscator* which I edited for close on two decades until 2010 when the cost of printing became prohibitive. I was able, subsequently, to get its best articles digitised and placed on the CPS website.

Equipment is the only thing

That's the title of a chapter in Gary Borger's stellar instructional book, *Presentation* (Tomorrow River Press, 1995) and it is appropriate because wading boots bookended my 30 years as an active fly angler.

My first trip to a trout stream near Cape Town was memorable only because of its misery. It was the beginning of spring and the stream was still high after the winter of 1978 when, with a second-hand fiberglass Hardy Jet and wearing lightweight trail running shoes with thin rubber soles, I cast my first shop-bought fly. It was the locally-developed Caribou Spider and, four decades later, it featured in a book written by Peter Brigg and I, *South African Fishing Flies – An Anthology of Milestone Patterns* (Struik, 2017).

I am averse to the cold and the Cape Province with its Mediterranean climate gets its rain in winter. I fell several times and, shivering with cold after these immersions, I brought an early end to my first angling trip with the realisation that I had to get proper wading boots. I felt, at the time, that if I used my ability as a reporter and photographer, I could help others avoid my calamitous start to fly fishing.

In 2010, my balance was affected by a rare neurological disease which reduced my balance and mobility, something I became aware of when attending the annual River Festival in Rhodes. I had bought some new wading boots with latest in sticky rubber soles and found myself stumbling and struggling to keep my balance. What bewildered me was the fact that other anglers wearing wading boots in various states of disrepair, were not finding the riverbed unusually slippery. Wading boots bookended my time as an active fly angler.

An environmental role

The Cape Piscatorial Society liaises with the provincial environmental governing body, Cape Nature, in monitoring the adverse impacts on mountain streams – with varying degrees of success, as these two photographs taken decades ago show.

The Witte stream is the closest brown trout stream to Cape Town - the top photograph shows what was known as 'Breakfast Pool' to fly anglers. It is situated about an hour's walk from the car park and it was a popular place for a coffee break before starting fishing.

The bottom photograph shows what the pool looked like after being dredged by local farmers who were concerned about the impact of winter floods on a weir which diverts much of the stream's flow during summer as part of their irrigation system.

The flow from the weir is just a trickle which has a significantly adverse impact on the stream below it and the CPS has been unable to change this situation.

Farming is a justifiably powerful lobby in South Africa's Western Cape Province – it employs more people than any other commercial sector and, by a substantial margin, provides the most export earnings.

Its wine estates are justifiably world famous and have been visited by millions of tourists over the years.

I watch with concern as the vineyards move up the mountain sides as farmers try to increase the yield of their farms and, with greater concern, the impact of agricultural irrigation on the region's streams.

CHAPTER 1



Breakfast Pool on the Witte stream in its pristine original condition



Dr Kas Hamman of Cape Nature examines Breakfast Pool after it was dredged by local farmers

The Flyfisherman (Pty) Ltd

The 1981 issue of *Piscator* carried an advertisement for South Africa's first angling shop devoted exclusively to fly fishing. Up till then, local fly anglers had, in the main, only had access to British brands such as Hardy and Veniard.

Tom Sutcliffe had journeyed to Manchester, Vermont to get the Orvis agency in South Africa. Orvis, the world's oldest mail order company specialising in outdoor pursuits, brought out lavishly-produced fly fishing and tying catalogues each year which we awaited as eagerly as a child awaits presents beneath the Christmas tree. It was also a period of intense innovation in American fly fishing which was well-documented in the magazine of the same name which I, for one, awaited with a similar sense of anticipation.

These Fly Fisherman articles were to mould and drive my own preoccupation with Lilliput streams and the benefits so derived were inspirational. Suddenly I was exposed to Ernest Schweibert, Lee and Joan Wulff, Dave Whitlock, Gary Borger, Lefty Kreh, Art Lee, Gary LaFontaine, Ed Koch, Ed Schenk, Rene Harrop, Harry Murray, Fran Betters, Tom Rosenbauer, Carl Richards and Doug Swisher and others.

The Birth of FOSAF

Cape Nature Conservation's Jonkershoek hatchery in Stellenbosch, the university town an hour's drive from Cape Town, had bred trout for the fly fishing fraternity since the 1890s but, a century later, the relationship between trout anglers and Cape Nature Conservation soured.

In the mid-1980s Cape Nature took the principled and justified position that it could no longer financially afford to breed and stock trout for what it perceived to be a small group of moneyed enthusiasts. It felt this role should be taken over by private rather than state-funded hatcheries. It also felt that its limited resources should be utilised to protect and promote indigenous fish species, some of which were threatened rather than an introduced species which is not native to South Africa. Fast-breeding imported species such as bass and bluegill in particular created an environment in which indigenous fish species, the minnows in particular, were at a life-threatening disadvantage.

Where Cape Nature made a mistake was to launch a propaganda war seeking to portray trout as a threat to indigenous fish species, a propaganda war in which it was supported by a vociferous and vehement anti-trout lobby and growing anti-colonial sentiment within the country. No evidence existed to prove that trout had extirpated any indigenous fish species and the positive role of trout in the context of job creation and tourism income was ignored in this campaign by the anti-trout lobby. That anti-trout sentiment continues to this day.

In response to the policy change by Cape Nature, fly anglers from throughout the country then gathered at the Eagles Ridge Hotel in Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape in March 1986 to create the Federation of Southern African Fly Fishers, a lobby group which would endeavour to promote their interests and conserve the environs in which they fished.

Its accomplishments since then have been significant but its founding as a lobby group was inevitable. Similar organisations such as Trout Unlimited in the USA and The Grayling Society in the UK prove the point. Appropriately, its first committee meeting was held on the premises of the Cape Piscatorial and I was appointed secretary at that meeting.

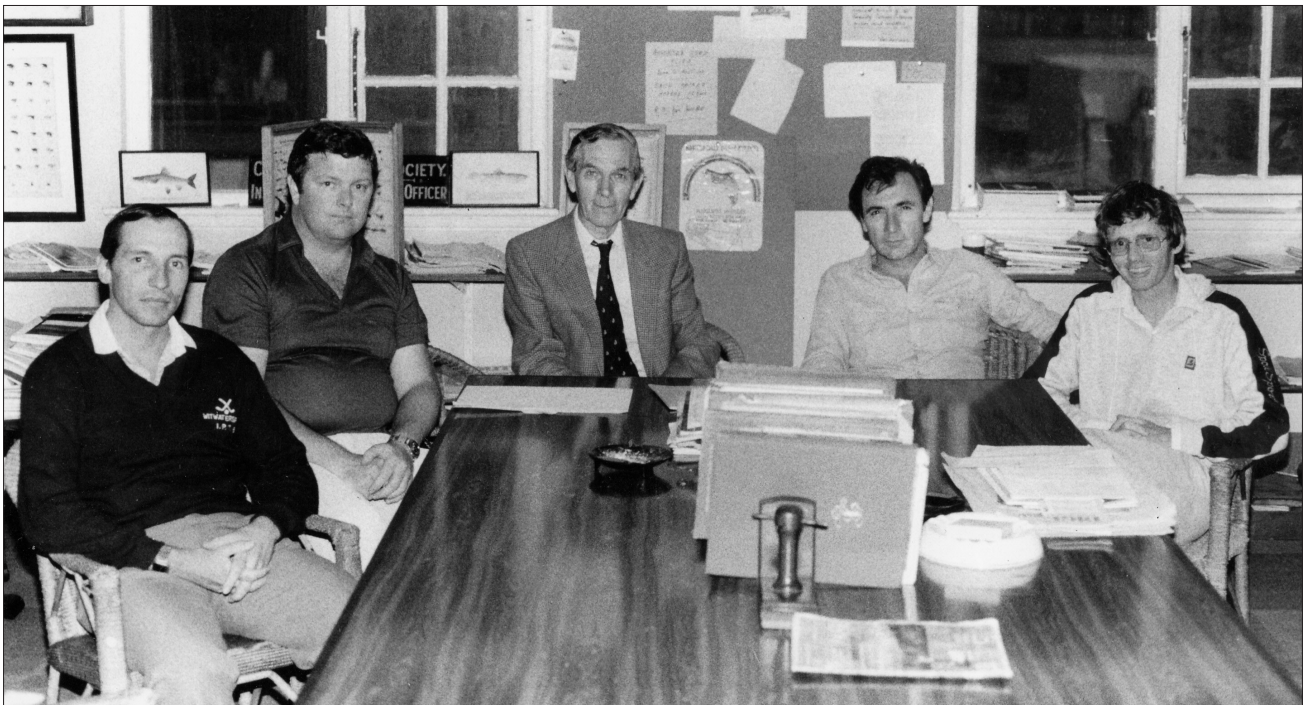
The role of trout in South Africa has been eloquently summed up by Professor Duncan Brown, Dean of the faculty of Literature at the University of the Western Cape in his book *Are Trout South African* (Picador, Africa 2013).

As he tells it, the leading promoter of the idea that trout are an existential threat with no redeeming merits is a retired academic at the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, Dr Jim Cambray. The major threat to our freshwater fish species on the Red Data list is habitat degradation.

CHAPTER 1



Delegates at the founding meeting of FOSAF in March 1986



FOSAF's first committee held at the CPS in Cape Town in 1986 – from left, Malcolm Meintjes, Vaughn Patterson, Fred Croney, Tom Sutcliffe and Ed Herbst

The major piscine threat to endangered minnows are bass and bluegill and the translocated sharp tooth catfish – called barbel locally. Bass and bluegill are able to out-compete our indigenous fish – for example the yellowfish, a Cyprinid which resembles the European barbel and chub – because yellowfish take several years to reach breeding maturity whereas bass and bluegill do so within a year. Another major threat, particularly, in the Eastern Cape, are sharptooth catfish, known as barbel locally, which have reached this province – where they were not previously found – through inter-basin water transfer via the linkage of the Orange River and the Fish River to facilitate irrigation and promote agriculture in that province.

Wikipedia refers to the 50-mile Orange-Fish River Tunnel, which was built in the 1960s, as the ‘longest continuous enclosed aqueduct in the southern hemisphere’.

I commissioned Dr Cambray to write an article on the ecological consequences of this tunnel and ‘Barbel, a catfish on the move’ appeared in the 2004 issue of *Piscator* and can be read on the CPS website in the ‘Trout Wars’ folder. As Dr Cambray points out, the barbel, which can reach 50 lbs, can survive in the harshest condition because of its ancillary air-breathing organs. When the water dries up, they simply hibernate in the moist earth until the next rainfall season.

This undermined the image of trout as the major threat to indigenous fish species which is promoted by the anti-trout lobby. What the anti-trout lobby cannot discount is the employment benefits brought about by trout ecotourism which, in a stillwater context is predicated on trout aquaculture. In a small country village like Dullstroom, a three-hour drive from Johannesburg, 80% of its inhabitants draw an income from fly angling-related tourism and the dams in the village are stocked from local hatcheries. In a country where more than a third of its citizens are unemployed and dependent on social grants, that is significant.

Dr Jeremy Shelton, whose Ph.D. thesis subject was the endangered minnow species of the Fynbos Biome, was interviewed by the editor of *The Mission* magazine, Tudor Caradoc Davies for an article headlined ‘What Lies Beneath’. He said that the greatest threat to these minnows was habitat degradation, that a stabilised level of co-existence had been largely established between the two and that this had to weighed against the eco-tourism benefits that trout had brought to the country.

In common with other fly angling lobby groups elsewhere, FOSAF’s major areas of concern are environmental. It opposes the absence of preventative maintenance at water treatment plants in ANC municipalities which has turned some of our rivers in urban centres into open sewers and government’s approval of mining in ecologically-important wilderness areas.

A second area of contestation in which FOSAF is involved is the battle with the Department of Environmental Affairs for control of the trout value chain and its declaration that trout are invasive which they are not, confined as they are to a tiny fraction of a hot and arid country.

In 2021 FOSAF achieved a significant court victory in this regard. FOSAF’s Yellowfish Working Group’s role is imperative when one considers the danger these indigenous species face from riverine pollution and mining in ecologically fragile areas.

The Wild Trout Association

The Wild Trout Association was started on the 18th April 1991 by Dave Walker and Martin Davies as a means of creating a mutually rewarding link between farmers and fly fishers in the Eastern Cape Highlands – Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear.

The Association, which is based in Rhodes, organises day ticket fishing for visitors on more than a hundred miles of stream and river giving approximately 70% of the rod fee to the riparian owner and retaining the rest for admin fees. At the time, Walker had a vision of establishing a conservancy in the area. Davies had a vision of a sport fishery in the area. Lengthy debates ensued and finally, a start was made on a constitution for a “conservation-based sport fishery”. Needless to say, for those who know Davies, this was not a short process. Ultimately, many hours later, the final version was typed

up and presented to potential founder members Basie Vosloo and Carien Vosloo, Graham and Margy Frost, Grant & Kathy Sephton and Marius and Debbie Robertson, all farm owners in the area. The sum total of water under their control amounted to 26 miles. A flyer with text and a map was printed and proudly distributed. The flyer was 1/3 of an A4 page printed on both sides.

Dave Walker, owner of a local 'Walkerbouts Country Inn' B&B was coerced into standing as chairman, a job which he duly undertook. It emerged many years later that this move had been plotted by Graham and Margy Frost together with Martin Davies and several other founder members.

To bring the new Association to the attention of a wider audience, Walker and company duly organised the Barkly Wild Trout Association Expo in April 1992. It was an auspicious gathering attended by fly fishing enthusiasts from all parts of South Africa. This is what I wrote at the time in Piscator, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society.

"The Barkly Wild Trout Association is unusual in concept in that it enables the riparian owners in the Barkly district to develop, improve and make available for public usage their streams, rivers and dams while retaining autonomous control of their property.

It is thus the first organisation of its kind in South Africa where riparian owners have come together to help each other develop a natural resource for the benefit the Barkly East community at large and the fly fishing public in general."

The Expo was opened by the Chairman of the President's Council, Dr Willie van Niekerk. In his speech Dr van Niekerk said that the principles upon which the Association is founded are sound and to be welcomed precisely because they counter the threat of syndication which, in some areas has made fly fishing for trout a sport to which only the affluent have access. He said that contrary to normal syndication practice where the farmer cedes control of his water to the syndicate, the association's constitution leaves that control firmly vested in the farmer.

Dr van Niekerk noted that the Association's members control only one hundred kilometres of the estimated one thousand kilometres of river fly fishing available in the district and called on other farmers to join the Association.

"If we can attract fly fishers to this area in significant numbers the ripple effect will be felt throughout the local economy. Such anglers stay at local hotels, fill up their vehicles at local garages and buy a wide range of consumer goods from soft drinks to newspapers and periodicals," he said.

Fishing was provided on the Karnemelk, Kraai, Sterkspruit, Bok, Joggem and Langkloof Rivers and the picturesque, Willow Stream.

Furthermore, a study done by Dr Mario du Preez and Deborah Lee of the Department of Economics, at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth shows that fly fishing results in a R5.6 million annual contribution to a village economy where the majority of people are unemployed and dependent on social grants. Dave Walker says that, in the interim, more than 15 000 day permits have been sold for more than a million rand of which 75% has been disbursed to riparian members over the past 25 years at an average of almost R43 000 per year. Dave adds that the cumulative spend by fly anglers over the past 30 years has added an estimated R20 million in trickle-down benefit to the local economy

The publicity spin-off for members and the region as a result of media coverage has been of inestimable value.

Hunting Trout

By the time the WTA was established Tom Sutcliffe had moved from Pietermaritzburg to Cape Town to take the position of head of hospital services for the province and we started fishing together, a friendship which saw us visiting Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear every year for the next two decades.

In Barkly East We stayed with Basie and Carien Vosloo on their farm Birkhall on the Sterkspruit River and with Graham and Margy Frost on their farm Balloch on the Willow Stream. We stayed at Dave Walker's B&B, the Walkerbouts Inn, when in Rhodes and with Ron and Robin Moore who farmed on the banks of the Little Pot River in Maclear. The Naude's Nek Pass links Rhodes and Maclear and Donie and Juan-Marie Naude whose farm Vrederus lies at the summit of the Pass, also became dear friends. During these trips Tom started keeping a diary which, several years later, morphed into *Hunting Trout*, South Africa's most-loved fly fishing book which is still in demand after being reprinted three times.

One of its chapters, *The Lakes at Inhluzane*, was included by Nick Lyons in his anthology *The Best Fishing Stories Ever Told* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2010). 'Return to Barkly' a relevant chapter from *Hunting Trout* can be found on the website of the CPS.

So many memories of the Eastern Cape Highland towns and villages – Barkly East, Rhodes and Maclear and of the Naude's Nek Pass which connects the latter two – and of its good people. Mostly of happy fishing memories but also memories of poignant import and of tragedy – read the chapter 'Memories and In Memorium'.

Becoming editor of *Piscator*

Piscator, journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society, was first published in 1948 and its editor was A C Harrison, a founding member of the CPS and a towering figure in its history for almost half a century. When he retired in 1978, a retired executive at the University of Cape Town, C Ross-Munro took over and when he died, the baton was passed to me.

A decade ago, printing costs became prohibitive and *Piscator* ceased publication. The vast amount of online information on fly fishing and fly tying had effectively made it redundant. Anxious to preserve its history and to make its rich literary heritage available to a current and future audience, I have, in the past few years, started digitising the most interesting of the *Piscator* articles with the help of Sunet Terblanche who runs a business administration company called Virtual 24-7.

Fly anglers in the British colonies, while drawing on the mother country's rich angling heritage, developed their own often ingenious answers to universal questions which is why I felt it important to archive *Piscator*'s contents. I have also added articles from the websites of Tom Sutcliffe and FOSAF and *The Mission* magazine and it is now the repository of a significant body of fly angling information which, in the main, pertains to small stream fly fishing, the subject of this book.



Sunet Terblanche who helped the author archive articles from *Piscator* on the CPS website gets a tying lesson from Gordon van der Spuy

The guiding experience

To be a fly fishing guide requires physical stamina, immense patience and an indomitable calm and, as I discovered in 2006, I am woefully bereft of all of those attributes.

To my financial detriment, I had asked for early retirement from my employ as a television news reporter in the Cape Town office of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The office had been taken over by two African National Congress acolytes and propaganda promoting a political party which had proved itself to be corrupt and inept in every way and censorship by omission to cover up its multitudinous and never-ending scandals, had become an enforced and untenable way of my professional life.

Behind me lay a career as news reporter and cameraman that spanned almost four tumultuous decades and five political leaders - from John Vorster to Thabo Mbeki. All that changed when I walked away from that profession and Ernst and Anchen Stofberg, owners of Dwarsberg farm near the village of Rawsonville, a 90-minute drive from Cape Town, offered me the opportunity to rent a house on the farm, almost on the banks of my favourite stream.

To add to my income I started guiding on the stream and I quickly discovered that if the weather conditions were unfavourable or your client lacked expertise, you became the target of their frustration.

The most common mistakes made by newcomers to Cape streams are false casting too much and ripping the line off the water if a cast goes astray. Fish-scaring false casting is the comfort food of our sport, a pleasant, rhythmic ritual that is as difficult to abstain from as giving up tobacco or alcohol or coffee. I saw it all the time, three false casts, backwards and forwards and then shoot – swish/swish, swish/swish, swish/swish ... cast. Very often this is because the angler is using the line weight designated on the rod blank but that formula is predicated on routinely casting with ten metres of line outside the rod tip – and on the Holsloot you are often casting at half that distance. I used a double taper line, one weight heavier than recommended for the rod model and cut it in half which gave me two lines for the price of one. I rarely had reason to cast even the length of half a fly line as I wandered up the bubble line, but my rods loaded easily at 15 feet and false casting to get the rod working in its sweet spot never became necessary.

When you are fishing with a friend you are relaxed but when a guide is watching you, it can add an element of tension. What sometimes happened, I found, was that the client would become irritated when the fly didn't land where it was supposed to and, to rectify the situation, the line would be ripped off the water in the back cast prior to the fly be re-positioned.

"You've just put a flash of lighting across that trout's ceiling", I would say in a tone that I hoped would be taken as jocular.

On some occasions guiding was a memorable pleasure. At the time there was a company called Thunder City operating out of Cape Town which offered flights in British ex-combat jets such as the English Electric Lightning and the Blackburn Buccaneer. They would sweep down the Holsloot valley at what seemed to be tree height and I remember one such occasion when I guided my first client, a pharmacist.

He and his wife had arrived late the previous afternoon and booked into one of the cottages on the farm. He had only just started fly fishing and he had had a few largely unsuccessful trips to the Vaal River for yellowfish. He wanted a few casting tips and, although the wind was howling downstream, we walked the few hundred metres to the stream and I rigged his rod. It was a five weight and, attached to the dark-green leader was a large, buoyant strike indicator. It loaded and cast well enough but I was puzzled because on every back cast the strike indicator would submerge. *"Is this a floating line?"* I asked. He assured me that the shop assistant who had sold him the outfit had told him that a floating line was fitted. It was, in fact, a sinker and he was somewhat relieved because he now knew why his first fly fishing trips had proved so difficult.

The next day he used my rods. Custom-built on one weight Sage and Scott blanks by my friend and master craftsman, Stephen Boshoff, they incorporated our ideas of what the ultimate 'Small Stream Special' – aka the 'One-Off One Ounce' – should be and they were over-lined with two-weight Rio Pocket Water lines, specifically designed for the sort of conditions found on Western Cape trout streams.

He quickly mastered the roll cast and progressed from dry flies to nymphing with a strike indicator and we then used the rods alternately. We would try a stretch with the dry fly and, if that did not produce any interest, we would drift a nymph through the same run.

If the dead-drift nymph was ignored, the last cast would be stripped back and the occasional result was a trout rocketing across the stream to grab the rapidly-moving nymph.

Normally, one changes flies at the end of a run but I taught him to move to the next section of stream before selecting a hopefully more-productive pattern. I pointed out that the water upstream of where you are changing flies has yet to be disturbed and, while you are sorting through your fly box or gently tightening a knot, you might well see a fish move.

We took a lunch break in the shade looking up the long valley and, as we did so a dot appeared in the sky on the horizon. In an instant it was transformed into a jet fighter. It arrived in silence, ahead of its sound. Hugging the contours of the mountains at what seemed tree height it was overhead in a second, its visceral thunder obliterating the gentle sound of flowing water. We turned to watch in horrified fascination as it headed away from us, straight towards the towering peaks in the distance in what seemed an inevitable collision course. At the last moment it jinked upwards, tilting slightly, as it clawed its way exultantly into the heavens, its roar diminishing swiftly into a whisper until, once more, the comforting quietness of the mountain stream resumed its rightful precedence.

My companion sighed in content. *"I used to be a fanatic, now I'm an addict"*, he said emphatically.

In the late afternoon I gave him a fly tying demonstration under the oaks as he sampled a sauvignon blanc purchased from the Daschbosch cellar at the bottom of the valley and derived from grapes grown on Dwarsberg farm.

Another memorable guiding experience involved someone who, while nursing his wife through her terminal cancer promised himself a day on the stream with me.

It was cathartic for both of us.

On that day my prayers were answered, the sun shone, the birds sang, there was a gentle upstream breeze and the normally recalcitrant trout co-operated – and some of them were of respectable size.

As he left, he thanked me and his eyes glistened as he said: *"That was everything that I imagined it would be."* Don't thank me, my friend – my gratitude is equal to yours.

It wasn't always like that.

When I started guiding, I charged a thousand rand a day which was the going rate at the time.

Friends suggested that I charge R1200 as most of my clients would not object to such a fee. One of my early clients was a multi-millionaire executive of a local insurance company who was known for hiring all the cottages on the farm at weekends for his friends.

He arrived late on a Friday afternoon and, without charging him, I spent an hour working on his casting and then spent another hour giving him a fly tying demonstration. He invited me to join his friends for supper under the oaks – all delicatessen food as I recall.

During the evening one of the women declared that *"There are two sorts of people in life – those who queue and those who push in - and I belong to the latter group."* I queue, but it said a lot of the prevailing ethos among them and I held my counsel.

The next day I worked hard and successfully to provide him with good fishing and, at no extra cost, he used my custom-built rods. As a guide, you stop when your client stops and he only stopped when it was almost dark.

I, then in my early sixties, was exhausted. I could not remember what I had said I would charge him, whether I had asked for a thousand rand or twelve hundred.

"I can't remember what I said a day's fishing would cost you", I said questioningly.

"Five hundred rand", was his expressionless reply.

Instant, insensate, red-mist rage which I struggled to control.

"No, I would never have charged so little for a ten-hour day – twelve hundred rand", I said breathing deeply.

To add insult to injury, one of the things I did for clients was to take digital photographs which I would then burn onto a DVD and mail to them. He lived, predictably, in the wealthiest suburb in the city.

In 2007, my year of my guiding days ended when I was head-hunted to join the Cape Town municipality's media division. They apologised for offering me three times what I had been earning at what had become a state broadcaster, a state broadcaster constantly mired in corruption scandals and which subsequently required not one but two multi-billion rand bailouts.

I have written extensively about this for news websites such Politicsweb, Rational Standard, Biznews, The Media Online and others. Fly fishing and fly tying were my respite and my sanctuary.

The role of competitive angling

At a glance at the FIPS-MOUCHE website – home of the International Sport Fly Fishing Federation indicates it has, for three decades, played an extraordinary role in promoting the science of river and lake fly fishing, driving technological advance and building personal bonds across continents. It has played a similarly beneficial role in South Africa with our male, female and youth teams doing us proud in international competition.

CPS member Korrie Broos has built on those friendships to bring a series of anglers from abroad who had excelled in international competition to this country to hold clinics and impart their skills. He did this at his own expense.

At the 2002 World Championships in France he made friends the captain of the Italian team, Edoardo Ferrero who is now vice president of Fips-Mouche. Edoardo subsequently visited South Africa along with Pier-Luigi Concito who won individual gold medals twice in the world championships

Edoardo pronounced our streams as ideal soft hackle water and introduced us to the Arpo, a deadly CDC caddis pattern which is quick and easy to tie. In 2007 he brought Jiri Klima and Karel Krivanec from the Czech Republic and they spent a day and a night at Dwarsberg Trout Haven on the Holsloot Stream.

It was an eye-opener.

He fished an eight foot #2 weight rod with a team of nymphs and his ability to drop those nymphs into the tiniest of pockets with inch-perfect precision made one understand why he had previously been called the "River God" by English angling author Charles Jardine.

In competitive fly angling one competes against the clock and to watch Jiri build a leader with a nymph on the point and another on the dropper within two to three minutes left a lasting impression if not any desire to emulate the feat. The sections of the two-metre leader were arm length and bitten off and, when every second counts, one understands why this is necessary. The dropper nymph was about 50 cm from the point fly.



Pascal Cognard at one of the stream fishing seminars he held in South Africa in 2013

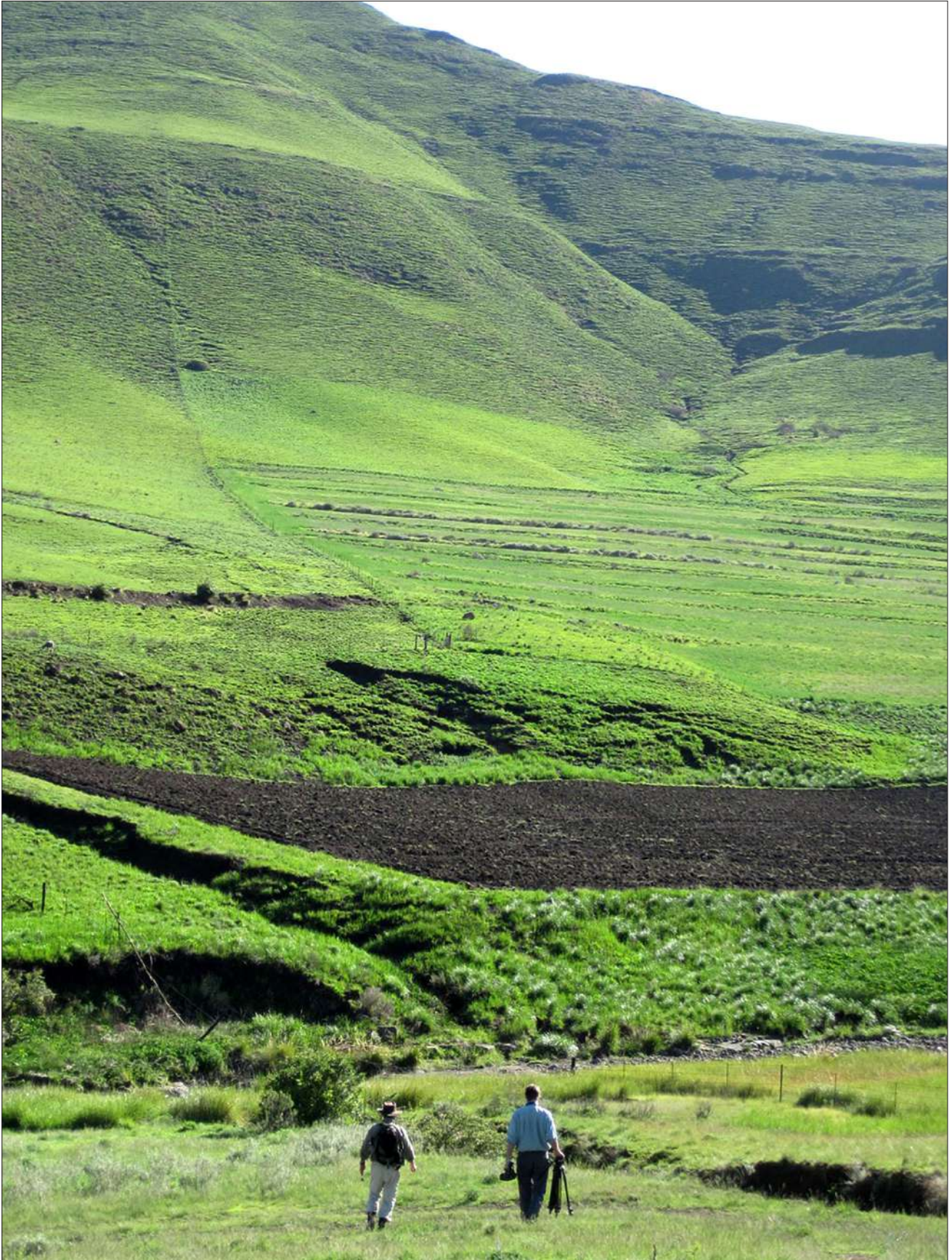
His wading barely caused a ripple and his casting was astonishingly quick and accurate. His drifts were very short and the longest time he took between casts was about seven seconds as he quickly and precisely probed all the spots that were likely to hold fish.

As dusk arrived, the mirrored surface of the stream was broken by tiny dimples as trout gently took emerging midges. Jiri persisted with his nymphs however and when I asked him why he had not adapted his tactics to suit the changed circumstance he said *"Because I like to fish this way."*

Korrie was subsequently to bring to South African Jiri Pechar who is heavily involved in organising the Fips-Mouche World Junior Fly Fishing Championships as well as Pascal Cognard, three times individual world fly fishing champion and Said Yahiaoui, a member of the French team from 1991 to 1993 and its current manager. Korrie accompanied me on my penultimate fly fishing trip in 2010. Although I did not know it at the time, my balance was beginning to be affected by a rare neurological disease. He was solicitous in assisting me and showed me techniques that I would never have considered or evolved on my own.

A South African fly tying journey

In 2010 Andrew Ingram, former Chief Photographer at the Cape Times and now an executive at the National Sea Rescue Institute, suggested that we collaborate on DVDS under the title of 'A South African Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends. We produced two which featured myself, Tom Sutcliffe, Dean Riphagen, Fred Steynberg, Mario Geldenhuys and Philip Meyer tying time-proven patterns of South African origin.



Andrew Ingram (right) walking towards a stream with Rhodes-based guide, Fred Steynberg during the filming of our DVD series on significant South African small stream patterns

They are now available on Vimeo:

www.vimeo.com/573845780 / Ed Herbst and friends flytying 2.mp4 on Vimeo



**Andrew Ingram films me interviewing Fred Steynberg for our two-part DVD series
'A South African Fly Tying Journey with Ed Herbst and friends'**

The end: As I mentioned earlier, my fly fishing days were bookended by wading boots. In the late seventies I bought a pair of felt-soled wading boots after realizing that I would injure myself trying to wade in running shoes. In 2010, I attended the annual Rhodes Fly Fishing Festival which is headquartered at Dave Walker's Walkerbouts Inn. I found myself struggling to keep my footing when others were experiencing no problems.

On my return to Cape Town I was diagnosed with CIDP, a weakening neurological disease. At first the doctors did not know what was wrong with me and Tom Sutcliffe made the breakthrough with a decision to send me to the Groote Schuur Private Academic Hospital.

I made my last trip to Barkly East with Tom and we stayed, as always, at Birkhall, the home of Basie and Carien Vosloo. Tom took me to the Sterkspruit River, I leaning on a carbon fiber wading staff made for me by Stephen Boshoff, he carrying a small camping stool. I set up my Sage Triple Ought - as always with a small sunken ant on the tippet - and slipped some waterproofed poly yarn through the loop-to-loop leader connection.

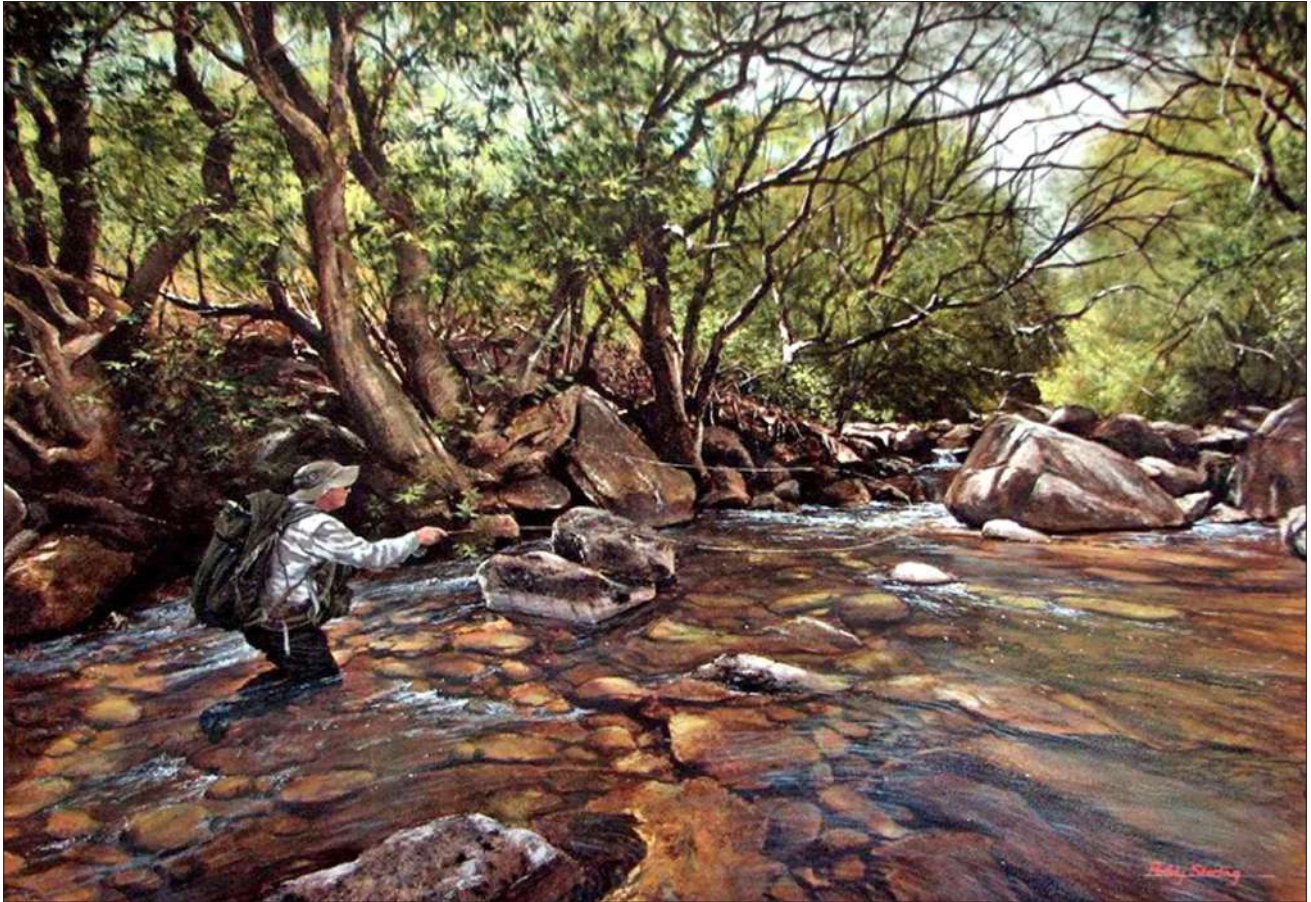
I painstakingly greased the leader with Mucilin and flipped a cast upstream, and then again.

On the third drift the strike indicator dipped and Tom released the small trout. My heart wasn't in it though. I missed the ever-changing chess game, each bend in the stream revealing a new set of problems to solve. I urged him to carry on fishing and hobbled back to the truck leaning on the wading staff. At the truck I fell but hauled myself up and into the cab.

In Cape Town endless medical tests and one period in hospital after another followed. Radiation killed the cancer and bought me another decade but it was touch and go for a while.

Tom made a call to a few friends and raised the money for a painting by Doug Starling which

was based on a photograph he had taken of me while we fished a small stream together for the last time. Before I had been given the painting, I phoned a friend who has seen it and the original photograph upon which it is based which was taken in a deeply-shaded section of the stream. “How does it compare?” I asked. “It’s better,” he said. “You can see the line”. Artistic license has its merits.



The Paddy Starling painting which fly fishing friends bought for me – casting from a kneeling position as usual

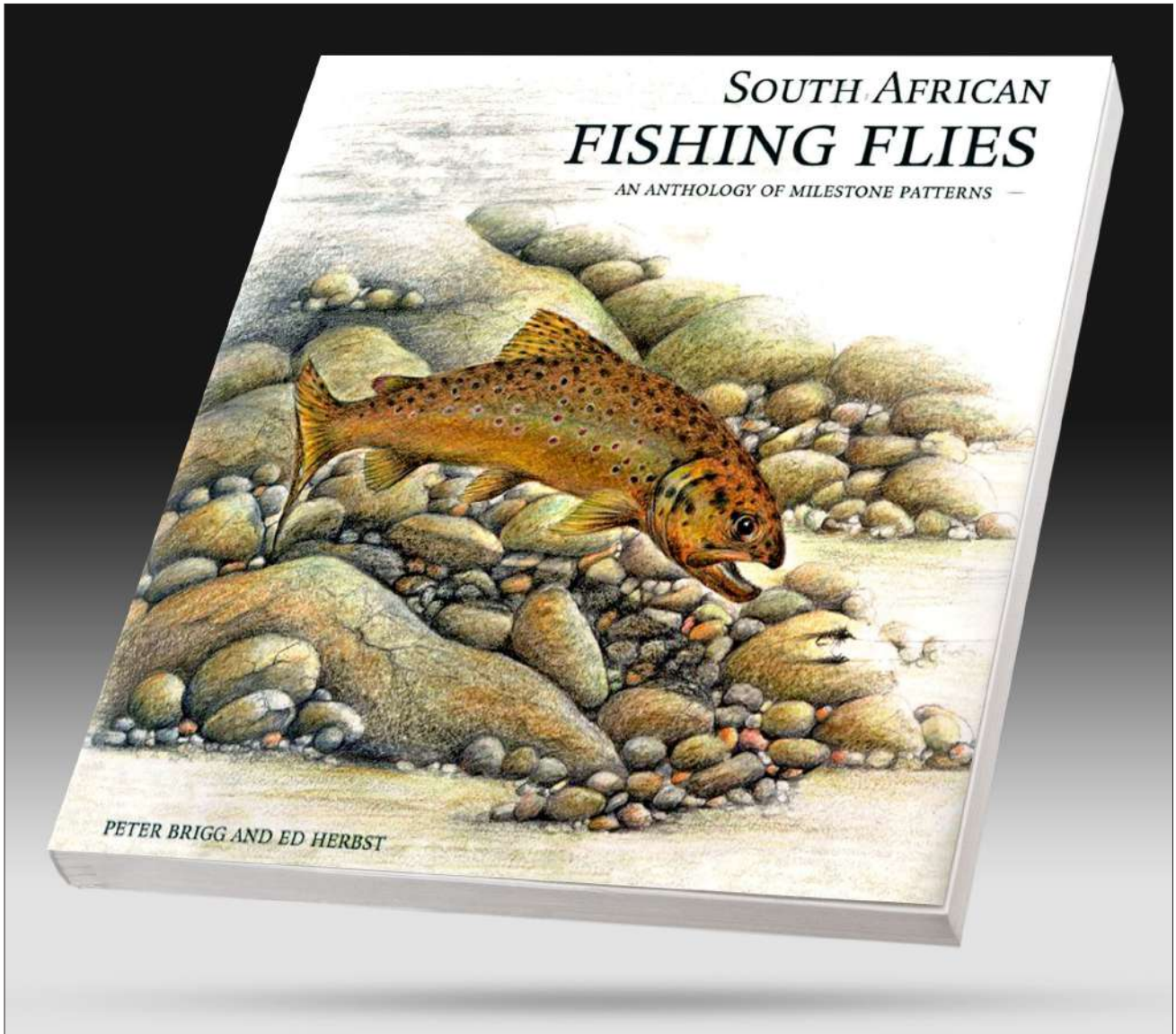
“I console myself with the thought that I still have fly tying – and a growing Instagram family”.

Tom then started his ‘Spirit of Fly Fishing’ website and newsletter which enables me to write contributions on fly fishing and tying trends and new tools and materials.

Tim Rolston asked me to write the foreword to his fly tying book, *Guide Flies*, essential reading for a fly tyer in my opinion as it draws on his decades as Cape Town’s leading guide and the wealth of information already carried on his ‘Fishing Gene’ website.

Milestone patterns – an indigenous fly chronology

In 2013 and now a pensioner, I was approached by Peter Brigg who suggested we co-author a book on fly patterns which could be considered indigenous to South Africa in terms of design, materials used and what they imitated. His coffee table book *Call of the Stream*, the most beautiful fly fishing book I have ever owned, had sold well and he was looking for another project. *South African Fishing Flies – An Anthology of Milestone Patterns* was published in 2017 and the publisher chose a watercolour by Peter for the cover. It consists of chapters by the people who invented the patterns and I feel it is an important contribution to the historical record. To make it accessible to a wider audience, I have had some of the chapters posted on the CPS website in the ‘Indigenous Flies’ folder.



Peter Brigg's exquisite watercolour on the book cover

CPS and the future

At the time of writing the CPS had celebrated its 90th birthday and, like all such organisations was adapting to the regimen prescribed by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is financially sound and local tourist organisations refer any overseas visitors who express an interest in fly fishing to it. Looking back over the past four decades, the biggest change is the amount of information that the internet has made available.

We now have access to YouTube instructional videos and innumerable websites which include those of the CPS and FOSAF and individual local fly anglers. Competitive fly angling, initially opposed by older CPS and FOSAF members has been of immense benefit because it has brought younger fly anglers into the fold and most of the CPS committee members compete.

FOSAF remains resolute in protecting the interests of fly anglers and conserving the environs in which they fish.

