

The Right Fly...

(Rhodes - April 2023)



How to pick the right fly, for the right fish, at the right time and put it exactly in the right place?

Every so often I have a suspicion that I am just very lucky in my flyfishing. It may be that my occasional brilliant success has more to do with Saint Andrew, the patron of fishermen and Scots, knowing that I carry a couple of tots worth of clan Maclaren in my bloodstream!

Recently, during a pilgrimage to the Southern Drakensberg highlands around the little hamlet of Rhodes in the Eastern Cape, it was demonstrated vividly just how lucky I can be!

My friend Ed Herbst knew of my upcoming trip to one of his own favourite haunts to fish the very streams he did many a time before. Naturally, passionate fly tier that Ed is, he tied a few dozen flies for me. Some were old favourites and some new and experimental. I recognised most, but there were also a few unknown ones that all went onto a special flybox reserved for Eds' flies.

On my first morning in Rhodes, the first port of call was of course the tourism office, to book beats to fish over the next few days. With well over 200 km of streams to choose from, the difficulty was to decide where to fish. But, as luck would have it, Tony Kietzman, renowned local flyfishing guide and artist, walked into the office and freely offered valuable advice on what was fishing well, where to go and much more. Sleep late, start late and stay late, he said. He was fishing the Upper Bell that morning. I booked Tenahead, the very uppermost bit of the Upper Bell.

I drove up Naudesnek Pass to Tenahead where, at an altitude of around 3000 m, the stream is truly a miniscule trickle in the deep folds of the Malutis. The landscape is totally treeless with exposed orange sandstone cliffs and high grass covered platos (where my other passion, greywing francolin, lives).

A cold westerly was blowing and the temperature was rapidly dropping while dark clouds started rolling in. A cold front! Bad news for fishing! Exactly the kind of weather that makes fish disappear and sensible people head for the log fire in the pub. But then, a cup of steaming



black coffee helped me to think straight. I came all the way from Cape Town, a tiring 16 hour long 1200 km drive away. The 50 km drive from Rhodes, up the very rough Naudesnek Pass, took another hour and a half. When you went to so much trouble to get to the right stream, you simply have to give it a chance, try some, spend another hour or so, you never know what will happen.

I fished the tiny high mountain stream, as clear as gin and in most parts small enough to jump across, with as much care as the gusty wind allowed. Fishing a nymph on a dropper below a dry fly was simply impossible in the wind. I snipped the dropper off. The little dry that remained was a Klinkhamer type parachute Adams variant with two very thin but very distinct wiggly jiggly rubber leg tails, imitating a mayfly half caught in the surface tension. I have not seen or used it before, but with the unconventional use of rubber leg material for tails, I had no doubt that it was straight from Ed, who is well known for his innovative and adventurous use of rubber legs.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a rise near the head of a pool in the bare bedrock, the size of a biggish Jacuzzi. Luck and a lull in the wind got the fly to land exactly in the right spot. The rise and the roll made it clear that the rainbow that took it was of some size. With a pool that small and that shallow, it was an interesting and tense fight. I don't think I was ever further than a rod length or two away from the fish. It made two spectacular jumps so that I could see its size and brilliant colours. I left my net in the Jeep because I was expecting only small fish, so I played it as cautiously as I could. It turned out to be a beautiful cock fish of around 45 centimetres, in almost full spawning colours. I took a few breathless, quick and awkward one handed pictures before releasing it back into its watery little world.

(After that follows the story of Des, her broken arm and our dash back to Cape Town, hospital, doctors and an operation, but that is another tale for another day.)

Of course I had to give Ed some feedback about my fishing. What worked? What did not? I told him the story of the big fish out of the very skinny Tenahead waters. Ed asked what fly it took, and I had to sheepishly admit that I did not know the name of it, but I quickly sent him a picture. Eds' reply was almost instantaneous: That is the infamous Edhamer, he said. It was designed by Tony Kietzman after Ed suggested using two thin rubber legs as tails to



add movement and the suggestion of life. Tony tried it like that and said that it doubled the takes from the trout. He named it after Ed, hence, the Edhamer.

So, there you have it: I was lucky enough to bump into Tony Kietzman, the designer of the fly, who suggested the stream where the most beautiful and hungry rainbow waited in the most unlikely bit of water on the unlikeliest of days. Then I was lucky enough to have that exact right fly in my pocket, tied and given to me by Ed Herbst, the man who inspired the fly and who it was named for.

What made me tie that fly on? Saint Andrew? The gods of fishing? I suspect Pure Luck?

