

Kosi Bay journal

by Gary Walters

On fly tackle I had caught large green-spotted kingies off the Bazaruto Sandspit; bonito off the Bazaruto archipelago and around the Madagascan atolls; skipjack tuna off Cape Point; black giant kingfish off the Madagascan volcanic atolls; snoek off Kommetjie and leervis at the Breede River mouth. I considered myself to be quite a seasoned saltwater fly fisher.

On conventional tackle I had landed a cob of over 100 pounds; had stopped the charge of a poenskop and had landed white musselcracker; had battled yellowfin tuna off Cape Point; had caught leeries, yellow tail and large elf (shad) on light tackle and had held on to the occasional large shark. I thought therefore that I had tamed some strong fish in my time.

None of my previous experiences, however, had prepared me for the giant Ignoblis kingfish of Kosi Mouth.

Standing on the ledge on the outside reef of the Kosi Mouth, buffeted by waves and white water from behind while punching what felt like a feather duster with a 12-weight rod into the teeth of a gale was not something I had previously contemplated. My guide, Ben Pretorius of Ufudu represented this to be the cutting edge of fly fishing. Yet, faced with this adversity I still felt that I was in control, and that I was master of these raw, rough and untamed elements. I was to learn, however, and with a large dose of humility, that the elements I experienced paled against the wild and savage nature of the giants of the Kosi Mouth.

The take, when it eventually came, was swift and savage and at no more than a rod length from me. By the time I had cognised the event, my stripping basket was empty and backing was being ripped from my Abel reel faster than I had ever imagined was possible. With the rod butt anchored through my stomach against my spine I tried to lift my rod and exert pressure on the fish, but was unable to counter the line speed - the rod remained vibrating just above the water line despite all my efforts.

The fish (rather unfortunately for me) had chosen to run into the current through the channel and way beyond the outer reef. If only, I was later to wish, he had at first bolted up into the Kosi system, I might then have had a better chance of landing him. At 200 metres out I felt him slow and then stop. With the 12 weight bent and groaning (yes, at that point I did manage to lift the rod) and my hand jamming the Abel, I turned his head and slowly started to pump him towards me. I really thought at that moment that I had him and that he would be mine.

Fifty metres of line came in under the steady pressure of the pump and grind when suddenly I felt his pectoral fins anchor. We remained deadlocked for some time with me exerting as much pressure as the rod and set-up could bear and with him in stationary defiance. I could see the fish; feel the fish; think the fish and for a moment I even thought I was the fish.



The Kosi Bay estuary on the northern coast of Kwa Zulu Natal with the fish traps set by local inhabitants clearly visible.



*Silhouetted by a setting sun, fly fishers target *Ignoblis* kingfish at Kosi Bay.*

I sensed the moment when he decided to turn. It was a measured and controlled movement over which I had no say. I shouted to Ben, now standing next to me, that the fish was about to go again, embarrassed by my previous arrogant outburst that I had beaten him and that he was mine. "Whatever you do, don't let him get past the point!" was the frantic response from Pretorius. I felt the muscles of the fish vibrate through the line and rod; I felt him drop his head as his tail kicked; I felt his defiance; his strength; his arrogance and his complete command. I hand-braked the reel and watched the rod bend in half. I felt him hesitate and for a short and foolish moment thought I had turned him once again. He was, however, gone.

I have lost fish before (many times in fact) and that deep, dead sense of dreaded disappointment that marks such occasions is therefore well-known to me. This was different. Through my shivering arms and legs and bruised sternum, electric energy pumped as a sense of awesome exuberance and exhilaration flooded my system. I screamed at him in an attempt to match his defiance and arrogance, but my voice was lost in the wind. And then I stood in silent awe.

For Ben it was a moment when his years of patient (and sometimes desperate) research into the rod set-up and tactics had gelled and been confirmed. He was well pleased, on inspection of my retrieved rig, with the result. For the others who shared the ledge with us, there was a feeling that Ben and I had over-played our hand - perhaps we should have let the fish run and then fought him on his terms. For me, however, it was the poetry of the moment that remained. I had taken him on on his terms, gone head to head, had measured myself against him, and had lost. He hadn't made a mistake - nor do I think had I. He was simply bigger and stronger than me on the occasion.

That fish changed me. He took with him not just my fly, but also a piece of me which now remains suspended in the blue off Kosi Bay. I have to go back, and will keep going back, irrespective of whether I meet him again, or not. I hope I do. I would love to subdue him and hold him in my arms, if just for a moment, conquered yet victorious. Or would I? Secretly I hope he will always get away and so retain that piece of me which I feel I have lost to him. Perhaps I need him to remain undefeated because that loss is in fact also my gain. Perhaps my spirit and soul need the giants of Kosi always to remain free and unbowed to my challenge. Perhaps what I have lost should not be found.

Editors note: See In the Red of Knight, Piscator No 133, November 2001. Visit Ben and Pam Pretorius' website at www.ufudu.co.za. They can be contacted at 031 7645356/082 4573442 or at benpam@ufudu.co.za



"Give a man a fish and you feed him for one day. Teach a man to fish and you get rid of him for a whole weekend." Anon.