

My brownie – at last

by Fred Davis

The days are getting longer and there is a certain smell in the breeze - a smell that brings to mind visions of long days spent exploring the kloofs, delving deep into their shadows and shallow streams, searching for their secrets.

The pollen in the air makes me want to sneeze. The insects are in a mad rush to gather it, their manna. There is a sense of expectancy and life that gives a thrill to the afternoon. I have felt this thrill before. It comes with a feeling of contentment and satisfaction of knowing that where I am, I am alone with nature.

Today, however, I need to do something. I need to prove that I am a trout fisherman. My father always said that you cannot call yourself a trout fisherman until you fool a wild, stream-bred brown. Today I need to catch my brown...

As the sun beats down on my slowly bronzing back, I quietly move forward. A slow, careful step followed by another even slower, more careful step. I've seen him. But how long until he hears my heart which is thundering in my ears? The beautiful butter-bellied brownie seems agitated as he slowly drifts close to the bottom against the current.

As I give him time to settle, I lose sight of the water. My brown seems to be swimming suspended in midair just above a dry stream bed. I wish I had more time to take it all in. I do my utmost to work out the cause of his agitation. Was it my approach? Some unnatural flash from my rod? Maybe a soaring eagle? Why? I cannot place the reason. I give it time.

These past minutes could be hours, but he's once again settled. He rises slowly and effortlessly to suck an insect from the surface film leaving nothing but the faintest dimple.

I'm mesmerised by this scene. The lush fynbos with all its unique shades of green seems to bend over the water and reach, like fingers, up the cliffs of the kloof. The insects continue their dance of life as the sun reflects down off the cliffs and creates an incredible contradiction between the icy water flowing around my knees and warm breeze wafting through my hair.

I sense my opportunity and in one flick drop my small, sparse, dry fly just upstream from the little brown. The cast seems perfect. The tippet becomes all but invisible as it mates with the surface film. The tiny fly sits high and floats freely, unhindered by drag, as it nears its intended destination.

It seems an age before the fly is in range of the little spotted predator, and yet, had I blinked, it would all be already over!

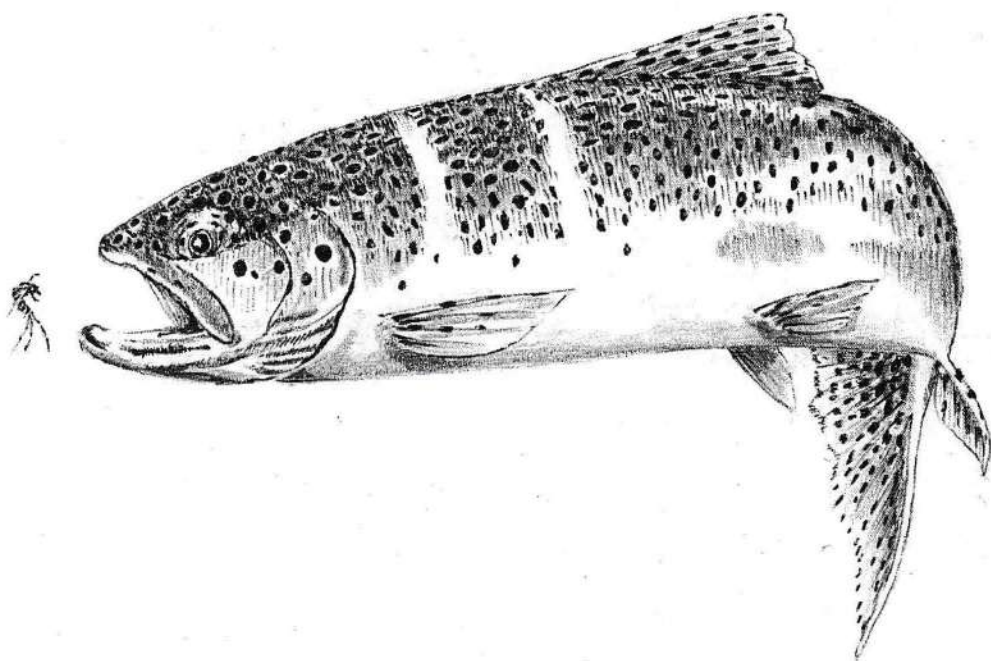
There's a movement. A slight change in direction of the brownie's path as it floats up.

And once again all I see is the dimple where there was once an insect or, this time, my fly on the surface.

I raise my rod and feel the featherweight piece of graphite bend under the resistance of the little fish as it vigorously shakes its head in an attempt to free itself from the unnatural tension it is experiencing.

After a short, feisty fight, characterised by splashes and some aerobatics, it comes almost willingly to my hand. As I cradle it in the water, I marvel at its beauty. It could be a real life painting. I take the hook out and hold it, head into the current, until it slowly starts what becomes a quick dash from my hands straight upstream to the safety of some rock or overhanging bush.

Thanks to these unforgettable circumstances in an incredible setting, I am now a trout fisherman.



Drawing by Tom Sutcliffe.