

My first lesson and stories capped

by Tom Sutcliffe

It was one of those routine Wednesday mornings in my first practice – patient after patient, thoughts as much on them as on what fishing I'd be doing that afternoon. My desk phone rang. The strong brogue of my old Irish friend, Terrance O' Mally, greeted me. "How'd you like an afternoon on Kingsley Lakes?" he asked. That was like saying "How'd you like a week's fishing in Alaska?" Kingsley had a formidable reputation for good, but strictly invitation-only fly fishing. I'd been there once. I remember three pound rainbows cruising all day, clear water, a number of large lakes, each one looking better than the other. "Thanks. I'll be there," I told Terrance.

"Right. We'll go in your car," he said.

We drove through the imposing main entrance of the farm and followed the drive along a row of plane trees. Suddenly Terrance told me to stop. "Pull in through this gate," he said, "and mind you park in the shade." He opened the gate. I threaded my car along vague tracks covered in tall grass, over a slight mound and into shade. Terrance carefully closed the gate and joined me. Anticipation was running high. I couldn't quite believe my luck.

We just had the boat launched when Terrance got his first rainbow. I was rowing, but the fish looked big so I settled the boat for him to play it. He netted the fish, smacked it on the head and dropped it into the boat. It looked about 5 pounds. I took a nice fish and was persuaded to keep it. "Never know when you'll bump a bad day," Terrance said. "You need to make up for them when you can." He landed another and kept it, and a few more after that. With the fish I got we soon had close to a dozen. The boat seemed awash with fish. Each time I dug the oars in they would slide *en masse* under my seat, then slip slowly back under Terrance's.

"What's the bag limit here?" I asked a little worried we might already be over it.

"Well I wouldn't rightly be knowing, son," he said, "but whose counting anyway, tell me?"

"Listen Terrance, we don't want to cook our chances on this water. It's too good. Didn't the owners say anything when they invited you?"

"Who said anything about an invitation then!" Terrance said. My blood froze.

"You mean we have 11 trout and we're poaching Kingsley?"

"Sure we are my boy. You have to live life a little dangerously now and again. Besides, you could never call yourself a proper Irishman if you haven't poached. Think of that."

"I'm not Irish," I said.

"Well, now, that's something to aspire to. And you just had your first lesson."

The coffee bar I frequented back then was run by a fishing buddy of mine, Andrew. I told him the story, starting with "You'll never cap this!" He listened, wiped tears of laughter from his eyes and agreed it would be a hard one to cap.

That winter I popped into the coffee bar one day unannounced. Andrew triumphantly said he could cap my story. He'd just got back from shooting trip with Terrance and Stan, a Natal Parks Board ranger. They'd bagged a few guinea fowl and were driving home on a dirt road at dusk. Terrance was sitting in the back holding the Jamisons. Suddenly he shouted. "Stop the car for Pete's sake! Stop the car!" Andrew came to a skidding stop thinking the old man had been taken short. Terrance got out. Andrew heard the boot opening and seconds later the sonic-sounding boom of a shotgun going off. Terrance was at the window. "Will ya fellas please be kind enough to give me a hand with this buck." He asked. They were out of the car in seconds. Just on the other side of the fence lay one very dead blesbok. They dragged the animal over and crammed it in the boot.

"You can expect your share of the biltong," O'Mally said, as they pulled off. (*Names and places have been changed to protect the innocent.*)



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