

The First Day on the Umzimkulu River

Underberg, Natal Drakensberg

From there I graduated to fishing for trout in the Umzimkulu...fly-fishing in paradise in those days...my uncle's farm Glenside had several kilometers of this productive water. It was hardly fished in those days. I grew to love Underberg and all the Natal Drakensberg. The smell of wet earth, burnt grass, the delicate aroma of the natural bush, the chants of the guinea fowl and the calls of the partridge (francolins) and caws of the raven conjure up a type of ecstasy for me...the odours of wet Wellingtons and waders combined with the smell of freshly gutted trout lying in your canvas bag or creel. The musty, woody smells in the farm-house of animals, fowls, old furniture and thatch. The characters in faded tweed jackets, deer-stalkers and good pipe tobacco...speaking in polite and good English.

It was the Michaelmas Holidays. Michaelmas in my schooldays was a short 10 day break that occurred in the spring months before the preparation of the end of the year exams. They were welcome breaks to us schoolboys in Natal especially if you were a boarder. My uncle Randal was to pick us up in his old truck and take us to his farm in Underberg. My mum had mentioned there was fishing for trout in the river. My brother and I had no idea how you fished for trout...we were simply told they had to be caught on feathered flies only. So on this limited information we trotted over to Kings Sport shop in Church Street and bought an assortment of flies...the attendant told us the best flies for trout in Underberg were connemarra blacks, teal and green, hardy's favourites and invictas. So armed with one or two of each...limited to our pocket money we happily awaited the arrival of uncle Randal's old truck.

He picked us up in the late afternoon...we sat in the back and I remember it took ages. The fog and mist set in and I remember Lundy's Hill...going down at a snails pace. It must have been very late when we finally arrived at the farm. Auntie Ivy welcomed us with a huge plate of soup...smelling of fresh veggies and mutton and then a roast lamb done in mint sauce. It was accompanied with thick slices of freshly baked homemade bread. Absolutely delicious...a huge contrast to boarding school rations. There was a fire warming in the large fireplace in the dining room with dogs and cats all over the show. This was nice...a child's paradise...everything in harmony...a welcome...a friendliness...a peace with all that was lovely in the world...a little touch and smell of heaven.

Although spring it was nippy in Underberg but that pleasant chilliness that makes little heads start to nod. There was the lovely smell of wood burning in the fireplace and all the aromas of wet Labradors, Setters and Retrievers and little Fox terriers coupled with very purring cats. Auntie Ivy commanded, bedtime...we were ushered into a large bedroom with old fashioned cast iron beds with goose quilt eiderdowns. I remember sinking down into them...enclosed by the welcome warmth...but snug as a bug in a rug. Sleep came instantly in those days...there were no worries or concerns about the things that adults get hung up about.

We told our aunt we wanted to be woken early because we were going fishing. How early she asked...six o'clock we replied...poof she replied, breakfast is at 7am anyway...you won't have

much time to fish. Oh I replied then 4.30 am please. Little did we know how difficult it would be? She said alright then but you must get up. Aunt Ivy was tough and direct, a very kind woman deep in her heart but from the Scottish pioneering stock that had little sympathy with idleness and weakness. I later grew to love her once I fully understood her absolute integrity. She was harsh at times, yes but was as reliable as a Swiss watch...tender in areas that surprised me once I got to know her...people like that do not exist today. They are wonderful and create such a feeling of goodness, trust and security.