

Fishing the Dorp Spruit

Pietermaritzburg, Natal

A year or 2 later our environment changed. Mom and dad were divorced and we moved to Pietermaritzburg in Natal. Moving here did not deter my love for fishing. We discovered fish in a little stream that flowed 300 yards from where we lived. Water always attracted me and one day I was peering into the stream I saw small silvery fish swimming under a rock. This was exciting...I was determined to catch them. I did not know what they fed on but I had heard somewhere that river fish are caught on flies. I thought flies meant simply the flies that bother you...houseflies. So I took the fly swatter and swatted a few. These I impaled on a tiny hook and dangled my hand line underneath the rock I spotted these fish. These fish (KZN Scalies or yellow fish as we they are known today) were not in the least interested and ignored my offerings. I was puzzled and flummoxed...what do they eat went through my young mind. My mum said why you don't try bread. So armed with a slice of bread or two I went back to this rock. I did not even know that you had to mould the bread into a dough-like ball. I put a little bread on my hook and to my surprise the little scaly took it. I managed to catch a few. Great excitement...I spent many an afternoon after school looking for scalies under rocks.

In winter the water was clear but when the summer storms came I could not puzzle out where to catch them as the waters flooded and became brown. Then one day I saw boys fishing the stream with corks and little hooks...they cast upstream and let the float drift down with the current. They were catching lots of scalies and the odd eel and were using flying ants (termites) for bait...the ones that come out in the November evenings during the thunderstorms and amass around the lights. This was very effective...something like nymphing or free drift but with bait. You cast up stream and suddenly your cork went down and you struck. We caught scalies like this up to a pound but no bigger. It was tiny stream...called the Dorp Spruit. Today it is polluted and hardly flows and I doubt if the scalies are still there.

The eels though were quite big sometimes...my friend battled with a 6 pounder once. This amazes me today...just shows how we have fouled up nature.

I remember the distinct earthy odour of the Natal Scaly and whenever I catch and release one on the fly rod, pleasant childhood memories come flooding back. Something there that's forever. The smells of early rain, the earth in Natal, the smell that it takes after the burnt grass in spring has a fragrance of it's own...the sounds of the Burchells Cougal, the Piet My Vrou, the Tink Tinkies, the Frets, the Ruddy Waxbills and the river has a smell...well it had in those days that was earthy and pleasant. The cooing of ring-neck doves and toppies all adding to this wonderful display of sounds and smells and even more than literature can describe.