



Du Toit's peaks it wasn't going to be an easy opening day.

We left the N1, cellphone signals and traffic noise behind and took the Hilux up and over the saddle beyond the Limietberg into the Hawequa Conservancy. The Toyota's cabin resembled a tackle shop – while we'd come with the full intention of fishing the river, the lodge also has various well-stocked dams and this early in the season we couldn't trust ourselves to select the right gear, so we just brought it all.

STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

As much as we couldn't wait to get onto the pristine, private river, the dams were the obvious place to start. Al had rigged his small river rod and was peering deep into his box of home-tied flies. Most fly fishermen fancy themselves as amateur entomologists, and Al is no different. On guide Ryan Weaver's advice, he eventually settled on a small, rather dark, Adams dry fly.

It wasn't long before the selection (and Al's stealth and good presentation of the fly) paid off when he landed a beautiful little brown trout. Brownies originate from the same family as rainbow trout, but are far less common in South Africa (they're

easily distinguished by the lack of spots on their tails).

A few casts later, Ryan spotted a slab of a trout cruising near a weed bed and coached Al into dropping his cast directly in its feeding path.

"Felt like I'd hooked a tree stump," laughed Al some 15 minutes later as he released the big hen fish. It was a nerve-wracking quarter of an hour. Because he was on his three-weight river rod with very light tippet (the piece of monofilament attaching the fly line to the flv) there was every chance the fish would break the tackle. But he also couldn't let it run too freely. Catch-and-release is the standard practice when it comes to Western Cape trout, and if you fight a big fish to exhaustion there isn't much chance of resuscitating it.

OF DRIFT AND DRAG

So with Al in the money, we decided it was time for the main course. With tackle and crew loaded back in the Hilux, the previous night's rain necessitated 4x4 and low range to avoid tail drift on the switchbacked pass down into the river valley.

And what a river. It's difficult to not get melodramatic when talking about the





The Jewel of the Southern Drakensberg has had a full makeover.

Sani Pass Hotel, famous for its breath-taking scenery and ambiance, has now been refurbished and offers guests even more entertainment and luxury with all the mod cons.

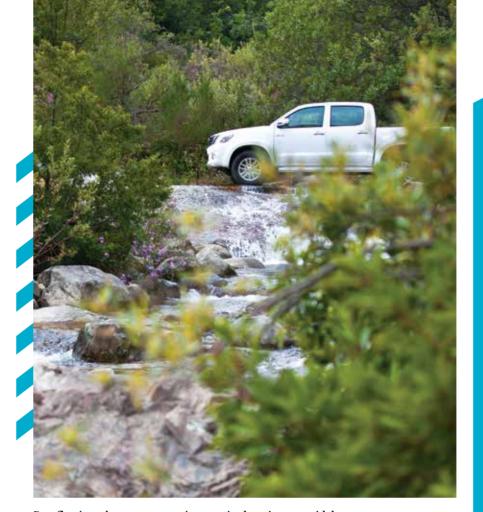


- the new Cigar Lounge offers top-shelf whiskeys, cigars and sushi.
- All rooms, bathrooms, conference venues and public areas are undergoing a complete refurbishment.



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Fast-flowing, clear waters require practised casting to avoid drag, which is a dead giveaway to the fish.

haunting river and mountainscapes we're so privileged to experience. The influential Charlie Fox was right: "The angler forgets most of the fish he catches, but he does not forget the streams and lakes in which they are caught."

This stream – as with other finest in the region – is likely to solicit a "how do you fish that?" from the uninitiated. It's closely overgrown, shallow, gin-clear, fast-flowing and often less than three metres across. There's no room for expansive, River Runs Through It-style casting. It's all about tight flicks and practised presentation of the fly.

The standard practice is to fish a dry

fly upstream, letting your fly drift back to you. Drag is the ultimate killer. Your fly needs to drift downstream in a natural fashion, so that the line and leader don't cause drag ripples across the surface of the water. Any unusual shadows or surface disruptions and you've spooked your quarry.

This is what I did all day long. No matter how much I tried to heed the Sage's advice, how many flies I took out of my box or how deftly I tried to cast, I just couldn't rise a fish from the five-degree waters.

Perhaps that's why I always quote Charlie. 🔼

> TRAVEL ADVISOR

Fizantakraal Trout Lodge is nestled deep in the dramatic Du Toit's Kloof mountains. The lodge looks out onto four picturesque trout dams holding beautifully conditioned rainbow and brown trout. Two pristine wild trout streams run through the farm, each offering private and exclusive access to some of the best dry flyfishing in the Western Cape. The hiking, birding and mountain biking is also excellent. The lodge sleeps six to eight people and needs to be booked out in its entirety. For rates, booking and guiding enquiries, contact 021-783-0652, go to www. fizantakraaltroutlodge.co.za or email info@liquidhorizon.co.za.

> FLY-FISHING BASICS

If you've caught fish with bait or on light tackle and lures, targeting them with a magic wand and tiny fly is the next step. Fly-fishermen don't throw those aerial loops with their lines to look like Brad Pitt in A River Runs Through It. The flies are so small, they cannot be cast conventionally so they need to get to where the fish are by 'fly' casting.

It's not as easy as it looks, but don't let it get overrated – casting is not art and can be taught. River lore on the other hand comes only with hundreds of casts, countless spooked fish and many tree-fouled lines.

> Casting 101: Find an open field or park. Rig up your rod and reel, but don't tie a fly on (you're bound to hook yourself in the back). Strip about five metres of line off the reel. Whisk it into the air and back over your shoulder until it's nearly straight. Then push it forward, keeping the rod tip between a metronome-like 10-and-2 position.

You want to load the rod tip with stored energy, then transmit that energy to the line, which lets you cast your tiny fly as far as you want. Casting without landing the fly on the water is known as false casting.

- > Species: Trout, yellowfish and tigerfish in freshwater; elf, garrick and kingfish in saltwater.
- **> Locations:** Mountain streams in the Western and Eastern Cape highlands: KwaZulu-Natal rivers and still waters: East Coast estuaries.
- > Tackle for beginners: Five or six-weight rod loaded with a floating line.
- > Compulsory reading: Learn to Flycast in a Weekend. Tim Rolston. Tim also guides visiting fishermen on the Cape streams and many rivers beyond. For sage advice, go to www.inkwaziflyfishing.co.za.