

Waving the MAGIC WAND

With big mountains, fast-flowing streams, wild-bred trout and dry flies, **JAZZ KUSCHKE** reckons the Western Cape offers the finest trout fishing in South Africa — even when the fish don't play along.

In Cape streams, precision and tight casting are essential in avoiding becoming tangled in low-hanging trees.

“Try small dries on light lines,” he offered when I told him where I was heading. “Get the tippet to sink. The fish up there are real suckers for that.”

Not many fishermen know this, apparently. I hadn't been on a Cape stream for over a year, so any advice was welcome; coming from this sage it was pure treasure.

LIVING FOR RIVER SEASON

September can hardly be called spring in the Cape — we're more than likely to still get lashed by north-westerly winds and frontal rain. Even the odd snowflake is not uncommon. Yet for the region's fly-fishermen it's the most anticipated month of the year — it's the start of river season.

The streams managed by the Cape Piscatorial Society (CPS) for Cape Nature Conservation are open from 1 September to 31 May. These are all tributaries of the Breede River system that flow eastward from the Du Toit's and Bain's Kloof mountains to the sea at Cape Infanta. Each has a magically unique character, but they share what Tom Sutcliffe calls “clear-cut, no-fuss, dry-fly” water in his book *Hunting Trout — Angles and Anecdotes on Trout Fishing*.

Work commitments and the weather had kept us off the rivers, but now we were going to open our accounts. Not only that, we'd been invited to fish the remote waters of an exclusive private lodge.

Mentioning fish and sucker in the same sentence, however, was a little above my levels of stream craft. So I didn't tell my companions Al Saville and Ryan Weaver about the master tip I'd been given, as the Hilux's smooth four-litre V6 hummed through the Huguenot Tunnel into Du Toit's Kloof. The Smalblaar and Elandsblad Rivers were both bubbling frothy white as we crossed the bridge. Running high, and no doubt cold, from snow melt off the



The angler forgets most of the fish he catches, but he does not forget the streams and lakes in which they are caught

WATCH THE VIDEO



Download the barcode-scanning software for your phone from <http://get.beetagg.com>, install it and launch. With this application you can scan the barcode with your phone and it will display the video. Watch a video on fly fishing techniques and Jazz Kuschke's compilation of this feature in the Boland's Du Toit's Kloof mountains by scanning this barcode with your smartphone camera. The video should load automatically. Alternatively, punch <http://bit.ly/okslig> directly into your web browser.

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 fly) 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 switch-backed pass down into the river valley.

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



> THE CAPE PISCATORIAL SOCIETY

The CPS is primarily a fly-fishing club; its members fly-fish for a wide variety of both fresh and saltwater species. The society also manages a variety of waters on behalf of Cape Nature Conservation and provides office facilities to both members and non-members for the arrangement of fishing permits. For membership details, info and access to fishing the Cape streams, phone 021-424-7725 or go to www.piscator.co.za.



1. Catch-and-release is standard practice, so fighting a fish to the point of exhaustion is a big no-no. / 2. Fly-fishing isn't all about stalking fish; the scenery and surrounds are half the reason to venture out of the city with your rod. / 3. Tying your own flies is one of the great pleasures of fly-fishing. / 4. Driving down to lush river beds in a 4x4 offers an aspect of adventure. / 5. To successfully tackle fly-fishing, skill and patience are required.

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.

- Enjoy massage and health therapies in the Wellness Centre, which overlooks the dazzling green of the newly redone nine-hole golf course.
- Unwind over fresh cocktails or even enjoy a spit braai at the poolside bar.
- For those who love the finer things in life, the new Cigar Lounge offers top-shelf whiskeys, cigars and sushi.
- All rooms, bathrooms, conference venues and public areas are undergoing a complete refurbishment.

SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY/TERMS & CONDITIONS APPLY



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VISIT US AND EXPERIENCE SANI PASS HOTEL LIKE NEVER BEFORE.



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 fly-fishing 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 Fly-cast 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.