

## MISS FARIO 1997

There is a very large dam on the northern side of the Karkloof Mountains. It was called Bloemendal in the days when we fished it and it probably still is known by that name to-day.

It was built on the Inyamvubu Stream in 1994 and it took only six months to fill. Its 33 hectares and three kilometre length are a wonder to look at and an impressive challenge to flyfishers. The Inyamvubu was stocked with brown trout in the early 1900s and a few rare descendants of those fish could still be caught in the dam and the river when we fished it.

However, as stated by Bob Crass in his book, *Trout in South Africa*: 'It (the river) winds across a broad, marshy plain, where its narrow channel used to produce brown trout of two pounds and more, but agricultural development and tree planting seem to have put an end to the fishing.'

Understandably, the dam has been stocked with rainbow trout – they grow faster and are more easily fooled by flyfishers than browns are. But if you catch a brownie in Bloemendal Dam, you catch a piece of history. Indeed, a beautiful specimen of three kilograms was caught in the dam shortly after it had filled. Undoubtedly this fish had already attained a very impressive size while still living in the river, confirming Bob Crass's conservative 'two pounds or more'. But, if your chances of catching one of those elusive brown trout are very meagre, your chances of catching a variety of species are better at Bloemendal than elsewhere – all the native species that lived in the

Inyamvubu can now be caught in the dam.

Obviously when my wife and I tackled up and launched our kick boats onto the dam on October 15, 1997 no brown trout had ever been caught since that three kilo fish was landed three years earlier.

But action we did get from our very first casts. After I had put back three fat rainbows, Brigitte demanded a fly like mine – an Olive Woolly Bugger. Immediately she got into the bigger stuff ... three and a half, four pounds, no problem. I snapped away with the camera for lack of much else to do. By 1 p.m. I said, 'Let's save some film for the bigger ones later on.' That having been said we drifted apart – me way up past the sunken trees, she near the sunken fence that bridged the riverbed.

Brigitte hooked one more fish (by then we had a tally of about ten between us) and I watched from a distance. I shouted, 'Is it big?' There was no audible answer, so I fished on, then looked again – she was still at it. Finally I got annoyed and headed to where she was. She landed the fish as I got close. It looked big.

She said, with her French accent and terminology: 'I think it's a fario' (*salmo trutta fario* is the latin name but French speakers like to just call them truite fario). I moved closer ... it was indeed a fario, and a beauty at that. She held the net in the water while I approached with the camera.

Small problem – the line was wrapped around the whole kick boat (who said browns don't fight?), and the miraculously unbroken rod was in a semi-circle. After some time, we got it all sorted out and I got some pictures. Time to release this obvious five-pounder. I took up the task of reviving the fish by holding it under water for a full ten minutes until it began to swish its tail. Unfortunately, once released, it headed for the bottom where we could clearly see it lying on its side. Always a very bad omen. It was impossible to reach it with the net so we quickly beached our boats and I waded back to the fish. But wading clouded up the water and I had to improvise a quick change of plan. I got back onto the kick boat, replaced my fly by the biggest streamer in my fly box, reeled the fly right up into the tip guide of my rod. I then poked at the fish a few times until ... hooray, it moved. Then suddenly the hook got caught in a fin and we retrieved Miss Fario1997. She was getting more famous by the second, even though she seemed a bit wobbly for a beauty queen.

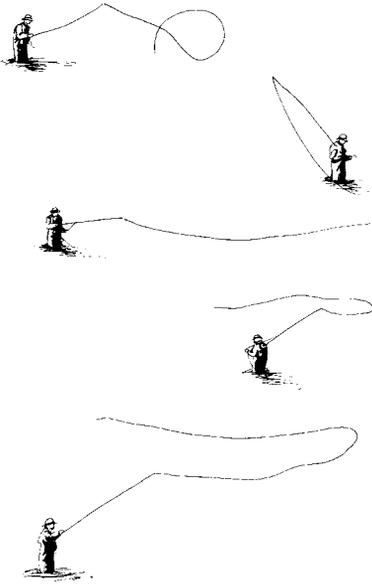
Brigitte then built a little rock cradle for her near the bank to hold her upright in the slow but running water while she got her breath back. During that time, I held onto her and joked that this was the first-ever brown trout to have been gaffed by an Orvis One Ounce 2-weight rod. Very soon we got her wedged into her cradle and she pumped some slow but steady water through her gills.

Then we waited. While waiting, Brigitte went to get her sandals from her kick boat because the rocks were like shoe polish on that bank. But she then slipped and fell flat on her back ... and head!

She came very close to being concussed and grew an instant golf ball on her occiput. Fortunately, it bled. But, less fortunately, her ham fisted husband did not know too much about how to handle such extracurricular flyfishing situations, so that the first aid was administered somewhat clumsily, and when we finally turned to our beauty queen, her gills were very quiet and the water around her very still and tepid. What a waste that had been of a brave, modest and beautiful survivor of a century of human development, in a vlei that simply could not have been left as the bushmen had possibly known it.

Miss Fario 1997 weighed 5lbs 5oz. A scale reading performed by the Natal Sharks Board (a free service to anglers) showed her to have lived four-and-a-half years. And a concerned young taxidermist by the name of Anton Martyn (now living in Ireland) mounted her free of charge for display at The Flyfisherman shop in Hilton. Anton's wish (I hope he gets a chance to read this) was that many more browns be spawned in the Inyamvubu to grow fat and desirable in Bloemendal Dam.





## THERE'S NO CASTING LIKE FLY CASTING

Inevitably, the sight of a fly line snaking ever so smoothly through the air when handled by a gentle flyfisher is a delight to the casual observer. And if that observer happens to be a non-flyfishing fisherman himself, his imagination is likely to be pleasantly aroused by the sight, and very soon he could find himself wondering whether he hasn't been missing something for all the years that he's been fishing other techniques. Even those who have never fished before cannot but waste a minute or two observing such a fly caster, plying his artful trade.

There was a day, about twenty-five years ago, when a South African television crew travelled to Dullstroom to do a short documentary film at the (then newly built) Critchley Hackle Lodge. In those days, flyfishing was simply not known to the general public and none of the film crew had ever seen such an animal as a flyfisher. In those days, The Flyfisherman in Maritzburg was the only fly shop in Africa and about the only place from which SATV could have recruited actors for their little film. So a handful of us were flown

to Dullstroom where we were filmed doing our thing on the water. We were filmed and interviewed on the ponds, lakes and streams of this well-known trout area by a crew who just could not stop shooting miles of footage of fly lines gracefully moving through the air. So taken were they by the antics of our fly lines that we were made to keep our lines airborne all the time in what ended up looking like an aerial ballet. Never mind if the fish were spooked by the overabundance of false casting. The fish we landed hardly meant a thing to the film crew – the casting was what mattered.

And it was that casting, as shown nationwide in that short film, that (to my personal view) was, to a degree, responsible for the rapid nationwide rise of interest in flyfishing of that time. It was that rather unusual film that sparked off a new passion in many folk. Indeed, here was a sport that could appeal to the many people (particularly of the fairer sex) who used to associate fishing only with smelly baits, heavy drinking and things like that, and who would never have dreamed that there could be a form of fishing that did not involve any kind of messy manipulations. All of that being said, don't get me wrong – I love sardines, earthworms, sandworms, dead mossies and half chickens and have used them all as bait at various times in my life. The only problem I have with them is that they don't fit into my fly boxes easily and they're a bugger to cast.

Another thing about fly casting that gives it special appeal to many is the fact that the perfect cast has yet to be made. Whereas the rank beginner can usually manage a fairly decent cast with only a few hours of practice, there is unlimited room for improvement and there are unlimited numbers of casts that all of us have yet not mastered – especially on running water with tricky currents. As a matter of fact, when fishing stillwaters on dog days, when boredom inevitably sets in, it's possible to kill time sharpening one's accuracy or by practicing special casts such as curve casts, roll casts or any of the many casts described in some of the more sophisticated books on the subject.

And, most important of all, when your cast has been made, perfect or imperfect as it might be, and a fish has fancied the look of your fly, taken it and turned, your long rod will come alive in your hands like no other rod ever could.





## OF LADIES, LARGEMOUTH BASS, AND OTHER DELIGHTS

Fishing wives are not born. But sometimes they can get that way. It simply takes quite a long time and a lot of compromising. Exceptions like Joan Wulff, Hester Plank and Maxi Holder are so rare they become famous overnight. I guess this has to do with the busy housewife having too many other things and people to attend to – school, food, the garden, acquiring a tan, but not just on the face and forearms. And, let's face it: we men are far more predisposed to the hunter/gatherer thing than they are. Or at least the girls believe more in the 'you hunt, I'll gather' principle.

Well, in my family things have worked out very harmoniously in the long run, that is to say after the long run of school years, dating years and leaving home years. But something has changed drastically – Brigitte now wears the pants around here. Like at one time I thought I should teach her to tie flies because we all know that girls are better at this than boys. Nowadays, I tie all the flies and sometimes I'm even made to tie them on to her tippet. I also change all the tippets, inflate both our kick boats, pack and unpack the car and gut whatever fish we keep. In exchange, I am made to believe that my choice of flies is always infallible and that my aptitude never

to catch the largest fish is just undeserved bad luck.

At first her rods were hand-me-down five and six weights that I had abandoned in favour of four-weight and lighter, but soon she discovered that her rods gave her a sore shoulder. To-day she goes out on the kick boat with two, seven foot Orvis One Ounce four-weights and two reels graced with a floating and an intermediate line but never fails to ask me which line and which fly she should use. She then blindly follows my advice for a full five minutes.

Are you tempted to take your better half on the water with you? If she's going to be totally new to the sport, I'd suggest you take her bass fishing with poppers. We have countless bass dams near us, wherever we live. So close most of the time that petrol is not a consideration. But the action and fun can be outstanding. You might have to borrow a kick boat and some tackle the first time around but you will find her very soon placing her poppers right up against the bank cast after cast. No chuck and chance it here. Every cast is a potential fish getter. And the reward, when old bucket-mouth sticks his head, then his whole body, out of the water is something she will never get tired of.

What's more, bass waters often also have bluegills and bluegills in this country can grow to twice the size they reach in their native America. You can catch them in all the same ways you catch bass and after you've dutifully gutted and filleted your lady-love's first bluegill, she'll cook you a meal fit for a king. And that king, in case you'd forgotten, is you.

