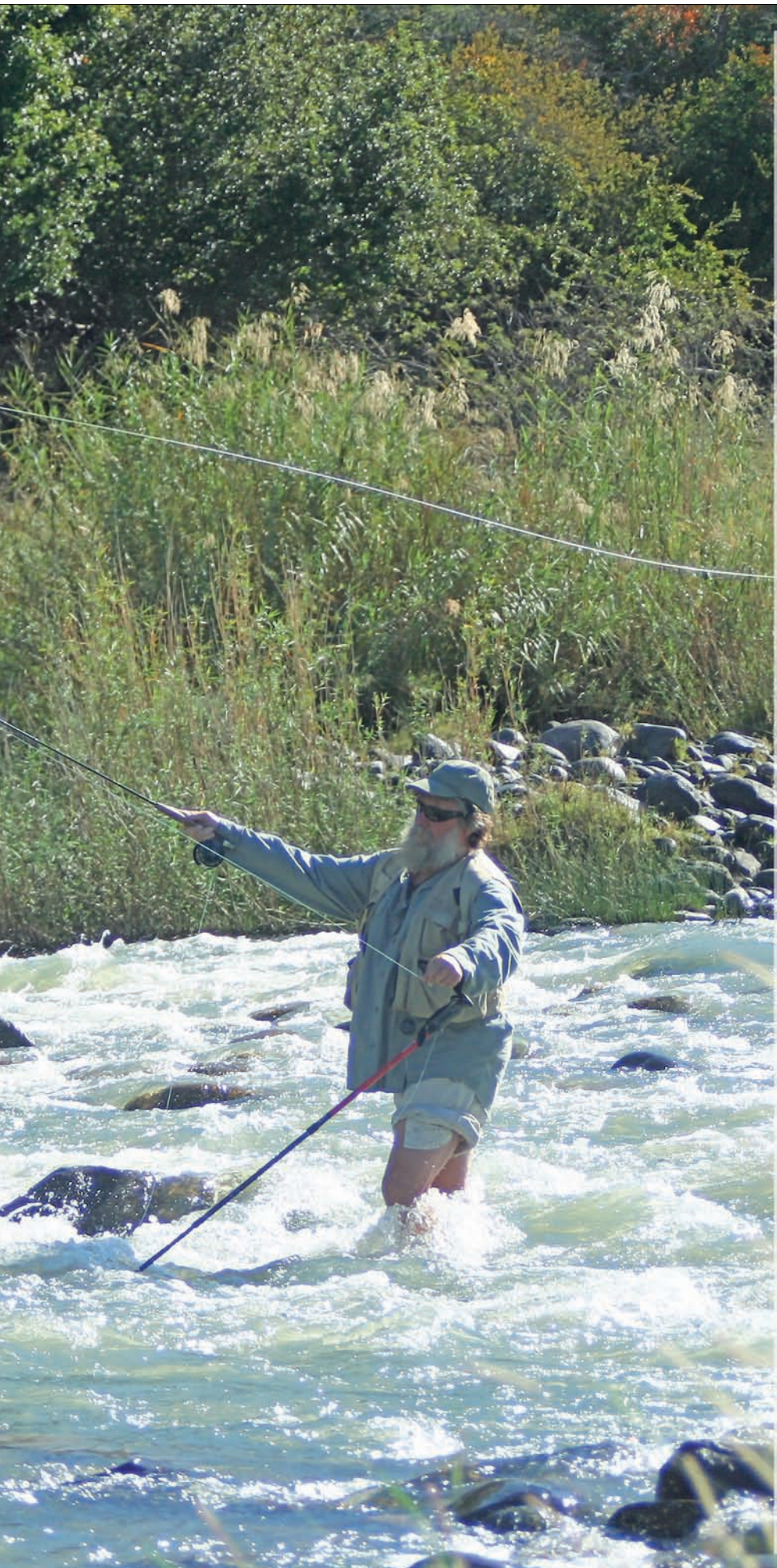


Mark Calverley works the rapids on the Tugela River.
“It is hard, but it’s also very rewarding, and you will
leave home and find things are different here.”

Tugela on *Fly*

“The startling one”
is something special



IN mid-August, two weeks ago, the water in our section of the Tugela was looking superb — clear and low with lots of channels. It was just the temperature that needed a healthy upward tweak — and maybe the mornings and evenings could also have done with a little extra warmth, just to show us that winter was thinking of changing her mind.

That was two weeks ago. Now, as I write, the water temperatures are great — I know that because the frogs tell me so every night. My body also tells me I'm overdressed when I wear my jersey, and there are insects by the hordes as I ride down to the river — up my nostrils and in my eyes — and I wouldn't have it any other way.

So what is keeping the rod on the rack and my foot tapping impatiently as I gaze, arms folded, at the river?

Level is great. Tick the box.

Temperature is good and improving daily. Tick the box.

It's just that those mountains have sent us *mud* and the river is sulking. There is nothing that sulks like a low, muddy river.

It's not natural. Low winter rivers here in the dry valley bushveld should be clean and clear. But I mustn't blame the mountains this time because there's been no snow and no rain. It's a man-made problem sent from afar to plague flyfishers and teach them patience as they await that marvelous time twixt winter and spawn when the scalies (*Labeobarbus natalensis*) — KZN yellowfish — run strong and hard.

I let my mind drift back to late July when we had a few halcyon days of warm evenings which produced perfect dry fly conditions in icy clear water. Two visitors from Montana were with us and they kept me a little quiet around the evening fire as they regaled us with Gierach-esque tales of their famous faraway land and its legendary waters.

Once again the river surprised me, and there are now two Montanians who are amazed that websites detailing what to do when you go on safaris to Africa in winter never mention catching scalies on fly. Dry fly nogal! In fact, I had the devil's own job keeping them focused on their safari list and only letting them loose on the river "after work".

Perhaps I was a little remiss in not clearing up their misconception that those few days were, in fact, not a rarity in midwinter and in the late afternoon. In my defence, though, it is impossible to predict what a river named the "startling one" will offer or



Two beautiful scalies — officially known as KZN yellowfish — taken from the Tugela. The different colour variations always spark much discussion.


perception held by those who have not taken the time to visit here and fall in love with this harsh African beauty that is the epitome of dry valley bushveld.

In the lower reaches of the Tugela, Shu Shu Island with its hot springs has become legendary, and the faithful have been returning annually for weeks on end to those springs, generation after generation, for decades, bringing much needed revenue to the locals. While Shu Shu has yet to be discovered by flyfishers, bait anglers have many tales to tell and recipes for scalies as long as your arm. Maybe one day we will convert them to C&R.

One reason for the Tugela remaining, in some sections, every bit as wild as the Zambezi, is that it is still grounded in the Africa of yesteryear, so some careful planning is required if you want to venture where the maps and the folklore still say “Beware — Here be Dragons”.

Some of the tributaries — like the Klip, Sundays, Blaauwkrantz, Bushmans, Mooi and Buffalo — are better known as trout streams of note in their higher reaches. However, they all feed into the Tugela, and the fishy residents include two species of mudfish, the KwaZulu-Natal yellowfish, barbel, eel and a couple of minnow species. It’s not a lot, really, but this is hard country and those that survive here are tough.

If you ever fish this river you’ll soon notice that it’s different to any other river you know. I well remember an occasion many years back when I hosted some well known names here. I was hoping to learn much from these learned ones, and I asked how they would fish the Tugela. “Like any other river,” they answered. They went home disappointed and never returned.

Yes, it is hard, but it’s also very rewarding, and you will leave home and find things are different here. After all, that’s why we travel — to find things that are different. At least that’s what happened to me more than 30 years ago — and I’m still here, rod hidden behind my back, trying to woo the startling one. 

- **Tugela (or Thukela) basically means “the startling one” or “the frightening one” in Zulu. This is due to the extreme volatility of the river and its waters in the rainy season.**

- **Mark Calverley owns and runs Zingela Safari and River Company, based on the Tugela River near Weenen in KZN. For more information on visiting this area and fishing the Tugela, contact Mark on <zingela@zingela-safaris.co.za> or visit their website <www.zingelasafaris.co.za>.**

withdraw from you. The only certainty is that she is unique, mysterious and amazingly untouched as she shoulders her way, like the hyphen, between the KwaZulu and the Natal that are her hinterlands.

Over 500km long, boasting a waterfall that would win a silver medal in the World Waterfall Olympics, she rises a stone’s throw from the source of the Orange and ends up in the Indian Ocean on the other side of the continent. The Tugela is many things, but it’s not a name that is well known to flyfishers, and the rugged terrain ensures long stretches of unfished waters through inhospitable country.

However, “inhospitable” is only a

BIG FISH COMPETITION



Premium
Fly Fishing
Equipment



Warren Rudy with his rainbow trout.

THIS ISSUE'S WINNER

Warren Rudy is this issue's winner with his 76cm rainbow trout.

Over to Warren for his story:

I was away for a wedding weekend near Tarkastad and managed to sneak off to Highland Home Dam for a few hours before breakfast. I found myself stalking up to some of the biggest trout I had ever seen, porpoising in and around some lilies. After an hour or so I had hooked and lost five rainbows. I decided to try to target a fish in deeper water.

I walked about 15 metres from the water's edge, on a steep slope, keeping behind as much greenery as possible for cover. A monster trout launched out of the depths and annihilated a cloud of tadpoles. I went down on my haunches, and watched the chaos in awe. After grabbing what she could, she disappeared into the deep. She soon reappeared, swimming slowly. I twitched the fly and 15 minutes later I took her out the water for a quick picture — and then I released her.

Congratulations, Warren. Please contact Xplorer Flyfishing on (031) 564-7368, or e-mail <jandi@netactive.co.za> to arrange collection or delivery of your prize.

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In each issue of FLYFISHING magazine, Xplorer will be giving away R2000 (retail value) of flyfishing equipment to one lucky angler who has submitted an entry to the Xplorer BIG FISH competition.

All submissions will receive a handsome, personally-inscribed certificate recognising the catch achievement which must equal or exceed the following minimum sizes:

FRESHWATER: Minimum weight - 2,5kg (5 lb 10 oz) or minimum length 55cm

SALTWATER: Minimum weight - 5kg (11 lb) or minimum length 70cm

* "Length" means the fork length - a measurement from fork of tail to tip of lower jaw.

Entries should include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address, plus a photograph of the fish, its size either in kilograms or pounds, or its length in centimetres, where and when the fish was caught, as well as details of the rod, reel, line-weight and fly.

The fish must have been caught within 12 months of the submission date.

Send your entries to: **XPLORER BIG FISH**

PO Box 20545, Durban North, 4016

Alternatively, entries can be e-mailed to angler@mags.co.za.

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