

Woodcliffe Fishing Report

By Hugh Chaplin
17 -21 March 2014

Little Pot River

In spite of recent heavy rains, the upper little pot was running higher than I'd known it but thankfully clear as ever. The fish, although plentiful in the smaller sizes (6 – 9") were just as demanding as the larger (10 – 14") which I was fortunate to catch. You only have to witness the tireless efforts of an 8" fish in its attempts to pull you under a rock or hang you up in rooted bank to appreciate the "wildness" of these fine fish. Fishing this absolute gem of a stream again, as has become my favoured annual pilgrimage, I was reminded that in a river of 7 inch fish, the 18 incher is a trophy. Deploying tactics worthy of eight pound browns in the New Zealand South Island rivers was the order of the day. Fine long leaders, tandem fly rigs, deep sunk bead-heads, small suspended nymphs, bushy dries, wiggle lift, high sticking, etc. all formed part of the required repertoire to capture these high spirited wild spawned rainbow trout. No clumsy footfalls or gravel grating wading is tolerated here, be guilty of this and the pool is immediately devoid of all fish.

Concentrating my fishing efforts from the old dam wall upward to the right fork beyond the second drift, GRHE Bead heads, Zaks, Hare & Coppers, various home-tied mayfly nymph patterns, hoppers and spiders in sizes 10 – 16 formed the core of my arsenal. Fishing the fast shallow runs was an absolute treat of dry fly action with fish coming up swiftly to inhale a Hopper, Humpy or Spider pattern as predictably as those early years on the Smalblaar in the Western Cape. Finding the deeper "blue" holes, or "pits" as I call them, at the head of the pools would require a change of tactic to either a suspended nymph, tandem nymph rig or deep sunk single nymph. Tedious as this may be, it produced the desired results with the larger fish being caught in these pits.

The best fish of my stay came from just such a pit. The size of a golf estate Jacuzzi, azure blue and deep enough to appear bottomless, bordered by boulders the size of RDP houses with foaming rapid inlet split by a Mini sized rock, it formed the atypical high altitude "pocket". I tied a length of 4lb fluro tippet onto the leader followed with a # 12 PTN tungsten bead head and finally an indicator. On first cast the indicator dipped within a second and I was into a lively 9" fish, quickly subdued and released downstream. I gave the pit the customary 10 minute pause as I was convinced it, given the brilliance of its conditions, held a better fish. The second pass ran deeper as I had placed the fly further up the inlet. Before the indicator moved I reacted to a broadside flash deep below to find myself fast into a heavier stronger fish. The 8" #3 weight bent its full medium action parabola as the line quickly came onto the reel as the fish circled the pit then headed downstream. Powerful surges for bank and boulder had my adrenaline racing till finally, 14" fish in hand, revived and released, so too was I!

Redcliffe Stream

This little stream, barely a meter wide and 10 centimetres deep at places, presented a completely different fishing experience to that of the Little Pot. Not the clear sparkling rapid waters of the former but rather a slow meandering trickle of grey / blue tint, reminiscent of the NZ glacial melt run-off, possibly as result of the clay based substrate. A series of long narrow shallow “runs” interspersed with small pools cutting through pastoral lands with little or no foliage for cover in the lower reaches made for an interesting approach.

I explored this stream one afternoon, for a change of pace, beginning below the farmhouse home of Melanie and Craig Sephton and followed its serpentine route into the Redcliffe valley. At first not convinced of much prospect of success, due to the prevailing river conditions, I persevered with similar tactics as before. On landing a couple of small (6”) fish, I noticed that they differed entirely in colour to those of the Little Pot, having an overall light olive hue with bright orange fins, as against the bright silver bodied grey finned fish of the former. I suspect, being a self-sustaining population of wild fish, originally stocked some hundred years previously, they may have taken on the colour of their, quite different, independent surroundings.

Fishing on I was to experience yet another “small stream surprise” in that of the 20 odd fish caught and released that afternoon, 5 were strong healthy fish of between 10 and 13”! Notwithstanding the pristine fly fishing of the Little Pot, this afternoons’ diversion proved the unexpected highlight of my stay. Strolling back that evening though the lands with sun slipping over the edge of the berg and foreboding rainclouds gathering, my adventurist spirit lifted in the knowledge that one could still come upon such unassuming gems with a bit of determined prospecting.

This report would be amiss not to include a word of thanks to my hosts, Phyll, Mel and Craig whose warm hospitality and generosity made possible the successful fly fishing adventure that was my stay. Many thanks for sharing your heavenly world with me and many other likeminded fly fishermen.

Take care and best wishes till next year.

Hugh “Fly in the ear guy” Chaplin

26 March 2014