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READERS' COMPETITION

COMPETITION DETAILS

Have you recently fished a venue and found the experience such that you are driven to put pen to paper? If so, why not enter our new Readers' Competition and stand a chance of winning a fantastic prize! If your article is published, you will win a great Wychwood product, compliments of TCFF and StreamX.

HOW TO ENTER

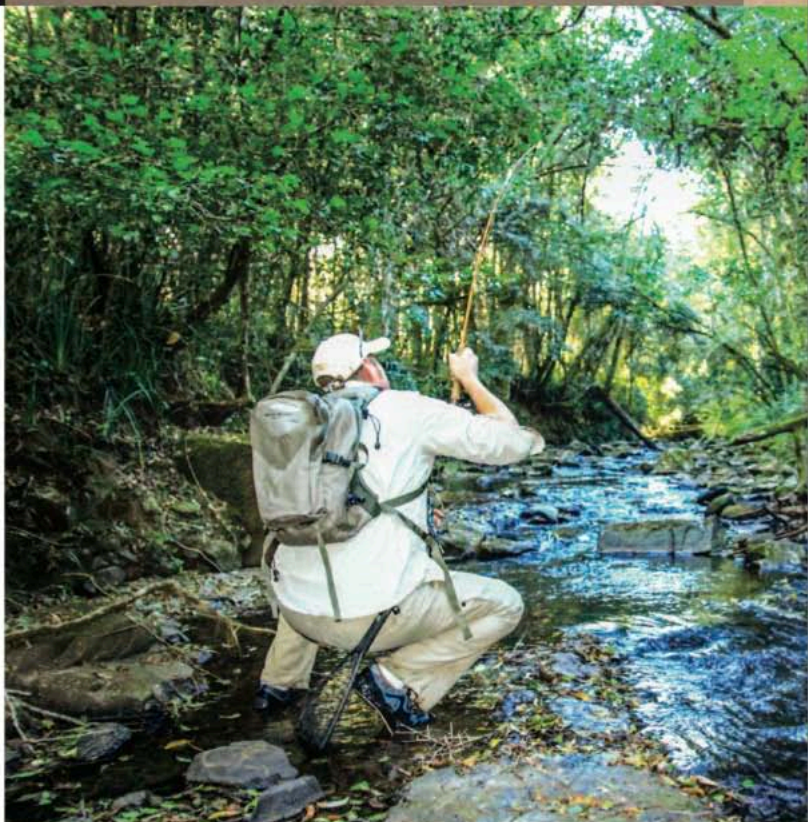
Provide us with no more than 1800 words in a Microsoft Word document describing your experience, the venue and anything else you feel necessary, and e-mail it to: editor@completelyfisherman.co.za. Send the photographs (a maximum of ten) in jpeg format (300dpi) via e-mail to: info@completelyfisherman.co.za, and we'll confirm your entry.

Our winner this month receives a **Wychwood Flow 7/8-wt titanium reel valued at R1190** compliments of TCFF and StreamX.



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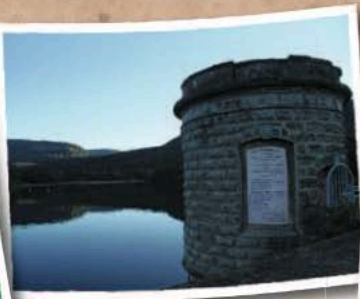


Sandile's Rest

By Ryan Smith

Where can you fish four stillwaters totalling 130ha, stocked with rainbows, and have a bubbling brook with its own wild, speckled beauties running through it? Have you ever come across something special right under your nose, but that has remained hidden from view for years as you drove by going somewhere else? Sandile's Rest in the foothills of the Amatola Mountains is just that and, thankfully, it has finally captured my attention.





A PLAN IS HATCHED

The trout estate lies in a tranquil valley about 20km southwest of Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape. The drive from my home in East London takes less than an hour, which gave me and two of my mates the idea for Operation Sandile: fish every bit of water in and around Sandile's in 24 hours. It was a tight schedule. Fellow Slumtowners, Marco Olivieri and Clint Henegan, and I hatched the plan to start on Sandile's Bottom Dam on a Friday evening in June. Maden Dam would be for Saturday morning, the Isidenge River through midday, with the evening rise at Gubu Dam. Lucky for us, Clint's cook-up-in-minutes talents meant we wouldn't waste much time on domestic admin.

Arriving at Sandile's Rest on the Friday afternoon, we quickly settled into the most astounding log cabin I've ever seen, and that's without mention of the perfect view. Grant Wylie is the owner-developer of the estate and he's built it all himself, starting with sawing up the blue-gum logs. The cabins are marvels of ingenuity, using trees Grant was told couldn't work.

Fortunately he doesn't take no for an answer and, when he commits to a project, he finds ways to get it done and finished off to top-end standards. Even if you're a scruffy, hard-core fly fisherman, once you're off the water, it's nice to have the comfort that comes with goose-down bedding. The kitchens have everything, so it doesn't matter if you're cooking *boerie* or baked Alaska, and there's DSTv to keep up with rugby.

BOTTOM DAM

On our first fishing session, in the Bottom Dam, a 4lb rainbow hen christened my new 3-wt rod, and another four fish followed – all fit, fat and flourishing. The dam has two jetties, making it easy for bank anglers to get at the rainbows, which are stocked from Grant's on-site hatchery. A six-pounder is the biggest the dam has given up so far and it's not unusual to have good evening's dry fly fishing on the back of prolific mayfly hatches. Back at the cabin, as we gathered in the boma to craft our plan of action for the following morning, I could feel myself beginning to escape the harsh reality of being part of The System and urban life. It's at those times that I question why we allow ourselves to be so consumed by the city lifestyle, when the true essence of life is in fact the basics, which we mostly take for granted. There is no feeling quite like sitting around a crackling fire on a cold winter's evening in the country, and looking up to glimpse a shooting star in the sparkling sky.

MADEN DAM

We headed out early on Saturday morning, and before you could say "Woolly Bigger" we found ourselves on the banks of Maden Dam. The morning was crisp, the air fresh and the sky clear, a perfect winter's day. We were greeted by two fellow East London fly fishermen who had spent the night in the Maden cabin. Historically, Maden has always

produced decent fish with some reaching over 70cm. Built and stocked in 1908 and adjacent to the now defunct Pirie Hatchery that dates from 1897, it's part of South Africa's beginnings in trout. Within an hour, I landed a magnificently coloured, 43cm cock fish that was clearly in spawning mode, followed by a 51cm hen. Both fish put on impressive acrobatics. Marco left empty-handed and Clint managed to pull two fish of 35cm. Our guest anglers, Warren and Miles, landed a few stockies, but a few days prior, Warren had managed to land some impressive hen fish of over 50cm. Three hours later and it was time to head back to Sandile's Rest. As I was kicking back to the bank, I found myself once again taking in the beauty of my surroundings.

ISIDENGE RIVER

After one of Clint's quick cook-ups, we changed tackle and tactics and applied our minds to do some river fishing in the enchanting Isidenge River, which originates in the foothills of the Amatola Mountains and runs for approximately 1.6km through the estate. It's really just a little stream but its surrounding indigenous vegetation makes for some incredible scenery and an amazing backdrop to roll cast against. The Isidenge is home to rainbow trout that are suspected of having been stocked in the lower parts of the river system over 18 years ago. The river was running crystal clear, which proved to be to our detriment and to the fish's advantage, as we were only able to pull one fish of ± 20 cm in the hour-and-a-half session. When sight-fishing for these magnificent fish on a previous trip, a mate and I managed to catch 17 fish in a day's session, all ranging between 11cm and 28cm. This time around, the fish had the upper hand but it gave us some time to spare so we headed back to the cabin to reorganise our gear for the evening session which lay ahead at Gubu Dam.



GUBU DAM

Our early morning start called for an afternoon power nap before heading to Gubu for the evening rise. I've always held Gubu Dam dear to my heart because this was where I had my first taste of what the art of fly fishing is all about, the first time my line peeled through my fingertips as a 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb rainbow took off into the depths of the dam. As we approached, we discussed which part of the 109ha of water we were going to



fish, and unanimously agreed that starting at Doctor's Creek and working our way to The Drift would be our best bet. While we were unpacking the float tubes, we heard the unmistakable cry of a fish



eagle from the mountain range behind us, and shortly after, it was circling The Drift in search of an evening feed. Knowing that the dam was stocked with over 21,000 fish in October 2013, and stories of browns and rainbows of over 6lb coming out just a few months prior, we couldn't wait to get onto the water.

"Trout anglers in the area have a lot to be thankful for as Grant and his team's hard work have made affordable fishing a reality."



Ripples could be seen as trout started feeding just below the surface. Marco agreed to fish the deeper water, and I wanted to see if I could match the hatch to ascertain what exactly these fish were feeding on. I tied on an olive, red-eyed Papa Roach and, within minutes, I noticed my floating line heading in the opposite direction. To my left, a fish of well over 4lb leapt into the air and the adrenaline raced through my veins. All the excitement caught me completely off guard, and in the process I dropped the fish. The next two hours were challenging, as the barometer plummeted like a lead balloon. I managed to pull three stockies of between 30cm and 35cm while my partner in crime, Marco, landed two slightly bigger fish in magnificent condition. Pound for pound, the fish in Gubu pack a seriously powerful punch. Back at Sandile's Rest, we sat around the fire reflecting on the past 24 hours' fishing, and I could not help but think of how many people go week in and week out sitting in their concrete jungles not knowing what beauty and splendour await them just a few minutes from home.

For the nonfisherman, Sandile's offers a number of outdoor activities. The estate is home to some friendly horses, beautiful trails for hikers and mountain bikers, and the surrounding vegetation is an attractive element for birders. Sandile's Rest also supplies many of the Eastern Cape waters with trout, and will shortly be supplying table trout too. The fishing on Gubu and Maden dams is managed and administered by the Amatola Fly Fishing Club (AFFC). Obtaining fish for them and the surrounding waters had always proved to be a costly affair, so when Edward Truter took over as chairman, an affordable source of trout for the AFFC became the priority. Many ideas and proposals were put on the table, including that of having a hatchery downstream of the Gubu Dam wall. However, when Edward met Grant, their creative and constructive minds devised a plan to build a hatchery on the estate. The process proved to be tricky, but thanks to the help of experts in the field, they made it happen. In July 2013, the first batch of 70,000 rainbow trout hatched. Trout anglers in the area have a lot to be thank-

ful for as Grant and his team's hard work have made affordable fishing a reality.

IN SUMMARY

The weekend for the three of us guys was filled with challenges, but we caught 14 fish, with the biggest being my 51cm hen. The trip was, to say the least, spectacular, and we will definitely be making this venue a regular for both fishing and family trips away in years to come. Grant's hospitality and the homely manner in which he runs the estate are truly commendable.

For more info, check out www.sandilesrest.co.za, or visit their Facebook page which contains a link to a video of our weekend there. Both give regular updates on the status of the trout fry as well as upcoming events and specials. More info on the Amatola Fly Fishing Club can be found at www.amatolaflyfishingclub.co.za

