

Fishing Adventures Part 2

Dave Smith's sailfish – July 2008

MEMBERS SNIPPETS

Madagascar Nosy-Be: Terra Rouges: Sailfish on Fly by Dave Smith

Not being a writer, I have no idea how to describe a mind blowing experience is a real challenge for me.

As with all major trips much planning & fly tying was done between February 08 & June 08. Believe it or not I still tied some mega clousers (5/0) the night before our departure, leaving SA with a lot of flies. **Yes!** A lot were chartreuse clousers in all sizes!

Saturday the 28th June, Anja & I flew to OR Tambo, where we met up with our daughters, Anuschka from PE & Maireschka from Pretoria. From OR Tambo we flew to Antananarivo with Madagascar Airways, a short 3.25 hour flight. On the flight they served one round of drinks before running out of THB "*Three Horses Beer*" (the local Malagasy beer), so we decided to give the local whisky or rum a try! We arrived in Tanna just as the sun was setting.

We slept over on the Saturday night in Tanna. Sunday we spent shopping the craft market & our mode of transport was a Renault, a real banger like those used in the amazing race (smaller than a Fiat Uno) which we, 4 adults + the taxi driver squashed into.

Late Sunday afternoon we flew to Nosy Be an island in the north west of Madagascar. On arrival we were told that it was too late for us to transfer to Terra Rouges (our final destination) as the tide was too low & we would have to stay over in Hell-Ville (the main town in the district) for the night & that we would be transferred early the next morning. Needless to say I was like a race horse in a horse box & nowhere near a racecourse.

On the Monday we were all up early 5:30am (4.30am SA time) ready to have breakfast as the sun rose up over the sea. We were collected from the B&B Villa & taken to the beach for the boat trip to Terra Rouges. The island transfers on this island hopping trip are a storey on their own & need to be told over a drink or two!

Eventually we arrived at Terra Rouges around 8:45 & I was informed my boat was ready to leave when I was! I had been mentally ready for this trip for weeks now however, my tackle was still in the travel bags. On hearing this I switched to rush mode, so I tackled up the 9wt & 12wt rod, changing the 12wt floating line to an intermediate. *This, on the advice of the chief guide who we spoke to in Hell-Ville before he left for Italy.*

I quickly changed the line, but did not stack it tight as I thought that I would run the line out behind the boat to wet it & then stack it tight, I also took the little blue & white pills to prevent sea sickness. I'm not good on boats at sea. Eventually I got to the boat at 09:30 & we headed out to start the fishing!

The skipper/guide in his broken French English apologised to me saying "*he do not speak English*". French being the main language made communication interesting at times as my French amounts to zero. By this time they also realised that I was a fly-fisherman, so they dropped the awnings etc.

At first I tried fishing for kingies over some really nice reefs & drop offs with no success or chases. At about mid morning Felici (*the skipper*) said; "*no fish, you fish for sailfish*". What a question, this is something I had dreamt & read about for months, so the answer was a resounding "**YES!**" I tied on a pink over white billfish baitfish fly, which is basically a mega deceiver tied using cocktail feathers (Schlappen). The fly had two hooks with one trailing behind the first, a 6/0 in the front & a 4/0 trailing with the hook up.

Felici & one boat hand put out the teasers (pink/red) rubber squid skirts & something that behaves like a perpetual flipper! I put in a few practice casts to get the hang of it, I must add that I had butterflies in my stomach. We trawled around for about 30 minutes, this felt like hours. Not long after Felici shouted **sailfish** in an excited tone. I still have no idea how Felici signaled for me to cast out the fly. I must mention that the cast was a total mess as the line shot out & tangled as it came out of the stripping basket. When one reads fly fishing magazines, the articles always make it sound easy. Honestly it's not, especially when it comes with a dose of Sailfish Fever!

Again the crew teased the sailfish up, this time I managed the line in a lot better, & with the switch I got a really good knock on the fly. I remembered reading that sailfish stun the baitfish by hitting them with their beak, & then inhale's them, so you need to wait a split second or two before setting the hook. Well, how on earth can one remember all this when your adrenalin is starting to pump & this huge fish is chasing down & knocking your fly?

Feleci said; *do not worry we get sailfish just now.* They teased up another sailfish and the story repeated itself with a chase and a knock but no take! Then Feleci said; *they not chase good.* What he meant, was the fish was not aggressive enough.

The reality had set in, fishing for sailfish is certainly not easy, plus the communication was adding to this challenge. With some more teasing another sailfish appeared at about 11:05 it came out of nowhere & this one was aggressive.

Feleci shouted; ***Cast!*** This I did & the fly landed right in the sweet area, the teasers were brought inboard & the speed of the boat reduced. I felt the knock & actually thought that I had missed the take again! So I just held the rod steady & felt the line firming up. Then all hell broke loose!

The line that was in the stripping basket was gone in a flash, I had set the drag quite stiff, but what happened next is difficult to describe! The sailfish took off at such a speed when it realises that it had been hooked. The first run was so rapid which caused the reel spin so fast that the centrifugal force threw out the line especially as it was not tightly packed, even with reel drag set quite firm.

I instinctively held the rod in the 35/40 degree position to absorb any shocks & then suddenly the reel stopped screaming, at this time I saw the sailfish coming out of the water & go airborne. What a site! Just watching as the fish shook & tossed its body trying to shake the fly. The line was still in the water between me & the fish, what a site to behold as it started to pull the line out of the water. I pulled the line back into the water as the sailfish plunged back into the water, & it was at this point that I realised I had a mini over wind caused by the unpacked line jumping over the reel bridge & pinching itself. For the second time the sailfish went airborne & I was determined that I was going to hold him no matter what.

On seeing the over wind, Felici immediately started to follow the fish with the boat & as the line “slackened” I managed to strip in some line into the basket. **Yes!** I do know how bad this all seems, however with some quick reactions from Feleci he had unclipped the spool, hastily untangled the loop that was pinched & reclipped the spool in. With this mess now sorted, I was fighting from the reel again just in time for one more run from the Sailfish which turned out to be his last run.

This all happened in the first 3 to 5 minutes, it then took me a further 20 minutes to get the sailfish on board as it fought & dived deeper to stay away from the boat. Even when I got the fish in close it took me round the boat at least 5 times, it could have been more before we managed to on deck the fish for a few photographs.

All I can say is; ***“this was a mind blowing/encrypting experience that will be with me for ever.”***

Facts

Fish Type:	Sailfish
Length:	225cm Fork to lower/short beak
Weight:	+ - 35kgs / 77lbs
Rod:	Thomas & Thomas 12wt
Reel:	Tibor Gulfstream QC
Line:	12wt Airflo GT intermediate line
Time Taken:	25 minutes
Date:	30/06/2008

About 1.5 hours later I got another sailfish to take, but lost it on the first run. It opened the back 4/0 hook.

The following day I fished for 8 hours & only managed to get two knocks, the sailfish were really not hungry. On the other hand we only tend to describe the successes & skip over that it really is tough out there on the sea.

I also did a bit of fishing from the side on the Wednesday & Thursday before we left Terra Rouges. I managed to catch a 15cm green spot & a 32cm bluefin kingie plus an unidentified fish.

What I can say this was an experience of a lifetime & I will do it again should the opportunity arise.

Tight lines on own tied flies!

Dave Smith



Congratulations Dave