

Big Fish Country

By

Ian Cox

Martin Davies has been pestering me for some months to sample his waters in the Eastern Cape and I have always demurred claiming pressure of work and distance as adequate reasons to say no. You see if I am going to drive the better part of a day to go fishing then it had better be a river. We have pretty good dams in KZN and one dam is like any other so why make the effort. Well Martin is a persistent sort of bloke so he just kept on nagging. If it wasn't the quality of the scotch he had on hand, it was the size of the fish and so on. Click [here](#) for more.



Martin into a good fish at Loch Lochy

I must say none of that worked. It was only when I attended a trout mapping workshop and saw the extent of the waters Martin had been bragging about and realised how woefully ill equipped I was to speak for them that I decided that an inspection in loco was not only necessary, it had become vitally important. So it was that I found myself headed west ostensibly to pick up my son from Rhodes University but in truth to learn a bit more about what Martin had been banging on about. And boy am I glad I did.

I met up with Martin or at least I was meant to meet up with him on a farm in the Hogsback area that boasted a dam called Loch Lochy. Pretty corny you might think but you would be wrong. The owner is Lochart and Jennifer Whyllie and let me tell you there is nothing corny about that dam or their superb hospitality. It was 80ha of pure unadulterated heaven; easily as good as the finest KZN has to offer. Indeed the area is uncannily like the Dargle and like the Dargle is about a 1.5 hours out of town, this time East London. But unlike the fly-fishing potential is massively underdeveloped.

It left me wondering if those blokes in East London are fast asleep. What is the Eastern Cape Tourism department doing? Trout fishing drives about 5% of KZN's tourism and what I saw within 1.5 to 2.5 hours of East London was easily as good.



The sublime Loch Lochy

But back to Loch Lochy. The fishing was superb. I only really fished the one day before lack of sleep caught up with me, but I have never encountered fighting fish of that quality. The 3.1 kg hog that engulfed my fly kept me busy for at least 20 minutes and I was fishing with 10lb tippet. Incidentally I was told that was getting recklessly light. The stokkies that ran to about 880g to 1kg put up a fight equal to fish at least twice the size.

Loch Lochy is in the Amatole range. Our next dam was in the Winterberg which is situated next door. This area which hovers about 1800m is truly wild. Our destination, Martin's much loved and ill named Thrift Dam offers true Scottish Loch Style fishing. The accommodation was of the fishing cottage variety. In other words the lavatory worked but the shower did not though that the weather did not encourage showering.

Thrift Dam is huge and the weather wild. The fish that come out of Thrift make all that seem tame. One fisherman hooked into an 85cm monster a couple of weeks before we arrived. I hooked into one of these head banging monsters and a 12lbs tippet proved to be insufficient. I did however manage some smaller fish around the 1.5 to 2kg mark.



The top end of Thrift Dam taken from the causeway. About 25% of the dam is in view.

Martin was the star of the trip, however out fishing me around 3 to one. I could not get my head around the fact that a speed cop woolly bugger could and does work better than a Papa Roach. And then he tied on one of Alan Hobson's (he of [Angler & Antelope Guesthouse](#) fame) beetle imitations and boy did things get wild. For a while he was hooking into 1.5kg trout every second cast.

It was with some regret we left Thrift for the luxury of Redcliffe and the superb care of Carol Morgan. We did not have much time there but I was still able to pull out a beautiful 1.8kg trout

A brace of Thrift rainbows just prior to being weighed and measured. All but one was released unscathed.



One of Martin's long finned beauties caught at Delton