

## **CAR VS CAD**

**By**

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Many people have spoken of why they fly fish, be it in salt or fresh water. Many will tell you that it is: because of the beautiful surroundings; to pit your wits against a wily fish; to enjoy the thrill of the fight; being out in the elements; to be able to hold in the hand and release a beautiful fish to fight another day i.e. Catch and Release (CAR); to extend your knowledge and understanding of the quarry and its habitat; the thrill of the outing; the friends made and the camaraderie of like-minded fishing nuts. I could go on and on. Very few will offer, "Because I like eating fish" i.e. a Catch and Devour (CAD).

I fish for all the reasons given above, but I also want to catch something that I can eat. I love eating fish. It is obvious from my portly figure that I love eating, full stop. Now, before I am stoned for making the statement that I love eating fish caught by fly (and any other accepted method), there are certain target species and conditions where I will accept that the respective norm is CAR. In freshwater these include river trout, but only in some rivers – more about this later, and yellowfish. In the salt, they include kingfish and the small, generally non-edibles like wave garrick, threadfins and such. I will certainly keep a decent sized sand gurnard, grunter or shad, all delicious fried in butter, with a squeeze of lemon.

In days of yore, CAD was the norm in fishing for trout in rivers. I have copies of Veld and Vlei and SA Angler, dating back from 1948 to 1966, with many tales of good catches and pictures of strings of trout caught from our rivers. As awful as some of these catches are, based on today's standards, they have to be tempered somewhat by many factors. Many of those would have been from a single outing, maybe the only outing of the year (read Rapture of the River where transport was by ox-wagon or on horseback, or included train and buggy trips, and later by traversing gravel roads of terrible condition by car (Trout Fishing in Natal by Neville Nuttal). And if you consider the anglers total for the year and compared it with the ones and twos taken by local anglers or more regular anglers, it would be far less over the whole fishing season. I remember the debate which came about when the NFFC proposed lowering the dam catch limit from four trout to two. How some spoke of a four fish limit being unacceptable, almost barbaric in these times, and yet some of those same critics would fish almost every weekend and keep their regular ones and twos each outing. Many favouring the four trout limit would invariably be fishing once or twice a year. Even if it was four trips a year, his total for the year would be 16 fish which pales in comparison to the regular angler who could catch between 50 and a hundred fish a year. Who is the holier now? The same comment arose when someone fishing the Mooi, kept their 8 bag limit, and there was an outcry and immediate call for a lowering of the limit. Although there is a daily limit, there is no season limit, so the regular fly fisher could make a huge dent in the fish stocks when compared to the more casual angler.

Some will argue that all river-caught trout should be released, and I agree that some rivers cannot take the pressure of fish being removed from the water and the fishery would not survive without catch and release. The Cape Rivers spring immediately to mind, as well as some of the high mountain waters of KZN. But there are many rivers and conditions under which trout should be removed in order to improve the fishery. Bob Crass, in his book "Trout Fishing in Natal" wrote of a few occasions

when the Mooi River had a problem being full of stunted, trout, and the river was poisoned with rotenone to thin them out. A few years after each event the trout fishing improved incredibly. Now, which is better, to catch a few fish of a decent size or catch a lot of stunted fish? I fished Rhodes for the first time last year and, as beautiful the area and the rivers are, the fishing to me was spoiled a little because there are too many small fish. Where is the thrill in catching thirty to forty trout a day, 6" to 8" in length, (I did not catch as many as that but I know of many who have boasted about such catches ). I know that under those conditions one can improve one's trip by hunting and targeting only the larger fish, by testing patterns and techniques, using the opportunity to hone your skills. Dave Prentiss had decided that was to be his target for that trip, be selective and hone up on his skills, rather than catching as many as possible .Catch and release is the order of the day in these waters, but this should only be dependent on the conditions, water levels, good spawning conditions and fish stocks. Under the conditions which we experienced last year, anglers should have been encouraged to remove fish. As far as eating small trout is concerned, many of the old brigade have spoken of how delicious the small trout are, fried crisply in butter.

In fact, part of the wonder of trout fishing to me in my earlier years was reading, not only about the catching of trout, but the cooking and eating of trout as well. Especially alongside the river. I never got to try it, but I could only dream of experiencing it. Who would not wish to have a lunch of trout alongside the river with a lovely fresh salad and a glass of champagne as Tom enticed us with his images from the chapter "Treats with Trout" in his Book, "My Way with Trout". He also had our mouths watering with simpler methods using newspaper, or just frying them, alongside the river, with butter. Neville Nuttall did much the same in his book "Trout Streams of Natal", as did Jolyon Nuttall when writing for Veld and Vlei during the 1960s, popping up to Chestnuts on the Umgeni, to comply with a promised fish supper. So, to me, I was brought up to understand that catching trout was synonymous with eating trout. A word of warning - many of the trout rivers are in areas which often have devastating fires so do not light fires except in designated area.



Trout wrapped in bacon

Too many sprout about catch and release as if it is not negotiable, and you are made to feel guilty if you keep a fish for the table. I say rubbish; at no time should you feel guilty about keeping a fish - where allowed of course.

Don't tell me that trout are "too beautiful and precious and must be released to fight another day". They are indeed beautiful, and precious, but often these words come out of the mouths of people who have fought a fish to a standstill and, when releasing the fish, it has no chance of survival. But they still take the sanctimonious air of having done the right thing! They have fished with inappropriate tackle, maximised the fight, and will boast of the time taken to land a fish, because, after all, "it is all about the fight between the angler and the quarry", take loads of photos, and then patting themselves on the back, release the fish, which, even if they did spend a few seconds trying to revive it, ended up on the bottom of the water, as crab food. There have been a number of fishing programmes where fish are held up for show while the egotist (or as Jim once said Boogaminas (a bit of pidgin Zulu), pontificates about all things beautiful about the fish whilst it is gasping and dying in his hands, and then releasing it by spearing it head first into the water so that it looks like it is swimming away, just before the cameras pan away so that you do not see the fish turn belly up. In our family, when we see this showboating we invariably yell, "put the fish back you \*\*\*\*\* (chose your own expletive)". I have got that one off my chest!

Many times this happens with large, trophy fish, the fish is released "for the benefit of the environment, because of the need to conserve, etc, etc". But the fish would not be threatened if we did not fish for it! If you are serious about CAR then at least ensure that the tackle is appropriate, bring it in as quickly as possible and release it as quickly as possible, and do not fish in warm water conditions with its low oxygen levels. They say that you should hold your breath for the time that the fish is out of the water. The same for a fish that you wish to keep, bring it in as quickly as possible and tap it on the head. Not only is this more humane, but when fish are fought for a long period, the resulting lactic acid build up in their body spoils its eating qualities.

As far as fishing for trout in dams is concerned, whether you keep a fish or two depends on the resources and the management policy of the club or establishment. If they have the resources to stock their waters so that anglers would be able to take out two fish per day, then so be it. If not, then limits should be reduced, or in some waters only CAR should be practiced. There has been huge debate in Britain about CAR, with some introducing it recently in order to maintain cost viability. I fished a water near London where CAR was not permitted, and when you reached your limit, you packed up and went home. Over here, where fish can be kept, once you have reached your limit you can carry on fishing. And then you have the dilemma where an angler has caught his limit, catches another trout which is bleeding from the gills, or wounded in some other way, and will surely die if released, so the fish is killed and added to the bag. Someone from FFA posed the question about keeping a wounded fish after you have reached your limit. I pointed out that our clubs seem to prefer a wounded fish to be kept and not released to land belly up. This of course could lead to abuse. If you were fishing provincial waters or in the sea, and you exceeded your quota, regardless of the fish's condition, if caught, you will be fined.

I could probably go on a bit more about CAR vs CAD, I haven't even mention PETA, or whether fish feel pain, which is a whole new ball game. But I think that I have said enough, got things off my chest, and hopefully you will never feel guilty about keeping a fish for the table. It is a personal thing.

One last thought, and something which has always amazed me, is that some of the most successful local fly fishers that I know, with freshwater and saltwater species list numbering in excess of 70, do not eat fish, although they have been known to keep an occasional fish for a friend.

Bon Appetit!

