

## Member's Tales: "Fishing with Roy and his handicap"

- Laurence Davies



Riverside Lower on the Mooi River

I am hard of hearing, however I can rely on a hearing aid to help me, whereas Roy is totally deaf, from the age of 6, I believe. And yet, when you spend enough time with him you forget that he is deaf because he communicates so well. I want to relate some of my experiences with Roy, and with his deafness, which to me, he does not see as a handicap and certainly does not retreat into a shell because of it.

I can't remember when I first met him, whether it was at a seminar on civil engineering matters, through John Rees, or at the Natal Fly Dressers meetings. Wherever it was, it was a loong time ago. I have been a member of NFDS for over 30 years and sat on the committee for a while and on the Durban Chapter of NFDS as well. When the Durban Chapter dissolved to form the Durban Fly Tyers, I retained my NFDS membership as well as the DFT membership, however I did not get to the Pietermaritzburg meetings that often.

Some years ago after discussions with John Rees, chairman of NFDS at the time, who was consulting to us at Water & Sanitation, I made a conscious effort to start supporting the NFDS committee and attended an end of the year braai. Subsequently I attended the monthly meetings at Westons in the Royal Show Grounds coming up with Peter or Jay when they were tying, and later, regularly with Graeme Neary. Throughout this latter period Roy was the NFDS secretary and he did a great job reviving the club, arranging guest speakers and stimulating interest.

Roy had also been the editor of the Natal Fly Fishers Club's Newsletter (before it was renamed The Creel) and I was the editor of the FFA's newsletter "The Leader" and I would send Roy copies of the Leader and would also send him copies of the DFT's newsletter. I also sent him articles for the NFFC newsletter. So we had quite a mix of interests, through work and through the various clubs and there was a natural progression to fishing together.

Our first trip was to Uitzicht dam which started off ominously. I was picking up Roy and he had sent me directions. The problem was that I was coming from Durban and the directions were for someone coming from the Pietermaritzburg direction! A call to Anne soon got me to the right address. It was a great day, but for me, the fishing was a bit of a disaster, hooking and losing some good fish, some long line releases and some through stupidity at the net. Roy had a great day, hooking a number of fish on a red eye damsel. At the end of the day he had caught and kept two fish and I had zilch. He offered me a fish and I gratefully accepted. I remember writing that my luck been so bad on the day, that if I had asked him to throw me the fish so that I could honestly say that I had "caught it", I would have dropped it.

The next outing with Roy was on Andrew Fowler's biannual trip to Rhodes, four years ago. This was my first trip to this beautiful area, where I joined Andrew, Dave Prentice, Paul De Wet and Roy. I got to fish with Roy on two of the beats. We took turns fishing alternative pools initially, and then Roy went ahead whilst I straggled behind trying to pick pockets. We caught lots and lots of small fish, my best being 12". There were two "funny" instances on this trip, the first was when Paul De Wet had taken off his size 14 fly and wanted to tie on something smaller, but could not see well enough to thread the fly. I keep a pair of cheap 2X glasses in my fly jacket and lent them to him. He returned them when we went to Rhodes four years later. The other instance was when Andrew showed us an Adams fly which he had tied on a size 30 hook. I had held it in the palm of my hand and after admiring it and marveling at Andrew's skill, dropped into Roy's palm. Roy looked at his palm, trying to see the fly and then held out his palm again saying that there was no fly. I checked my palm and then we checked the table and then the floor, even dragging a magnet across the floor, but it was gone. We surmised that, being so small and so light, any breath or small gust of wind could have taken the fly some distance. Every now and then I tease Roy and make out as though I am putting a fly on his palm but there is nothing, and he does the same to me.

Then we had a trip to Lower Riverside, on the Mooi. We had a leisurely, gentlemanly start, having breakfast at The Windmill and arriving at Lower Riverside around 10 O' clock. The drive from Rosetta to the river was not without some drama. Roy relies on lip reading, so when you talk to him you need to turn your head towards him, taking your eyes off the road a little. The road was in a shocking state and we hit a few large potholes and came quite close to the road edge on a few occasions. Fortunately there was virtually no traffic. Initially Roy had said the he would take me poaching on the Stillerus section, but then decided against it. I was trying out my new Boschhoff cane rod and was suitably armed with one of Shaun Futter's small stream nets, both of which I was dead keen to initiate on a decent sized brown trout.

After setting up, we made our way to the lower boundary and Roy approached the first pool whilst I observed. I was keen to see how he fished the water, knowing that he had fished this a number of times with Andrew. Second cast, he tangled his leader in the barbed wire fence behind him and had to leave the water to set up a new leader, so I fished on, pricking a few fish, but not hooking anything. When Roy had sorted out his leader, he joined me and we worked our way upstream, Roy working the right bank and I waded, fishing the left bank. We were both fishing nymphs and Roy was fishing with quite a large, floss, strike indicator whereas I had been a bit lazy and had not set up my strike indicator. A decent sized brown had a go at Roy's indicator and he let the fly fish the run, when a fish of 14" took his nymph. I made my way across the river to help him net it as he did not have a net with him. After being admired and photographed the fish was returned to the water and Roy continued working the right hand bank. I got a nice fish slightly smaller than Roy's, so I had at least blooded my rod on a nice brown and the net on Roy's fish.

After fishing out the pool, I noticed that clouds had formed over the Kamberg Nature Reserve and that there

were occasional flashes of lightning which grew in strength and frequency. Roy was totally focused on the water and did not see the lightning and of course could not hear it. As he was across the river, I could not catch his attention to warn him about the lightning, and then, after a particularly loud strike he looked up and made his way across the river. He later told me that he had felt the shock waves from the lightning. It also started to rain a little and we agreed to break for lunch whilst sheltering from the rain in the car. Roy was adamant that this was only a squall which would pass over. After about twenty minutes the rain eased off and we got our tackle together to hit the river again, only for the rain to start again. Back to the shelter of the car. After about an hour of these false starts we decided to call it a day, vowing to fish Lower Riverside again, from where we had stopped fishing. We did make a return trip a few months later but on this occasion the river was pumping and we gave up after a short while.

This year's Rhodes biannual included Roy, Paul, Andrew, Anton, Rhett and myself. Although the trips are planned for 7 days, Anton and I could only make three days, fishing on Monday and Tuesday and leaving on Wednesday. Roy and Andrew had left on the Saturday and the rest of us on the Sunday. After we had all gathered and greeted, I was standing outside Branksome with Roy and I said to him, "Isn't this great. Hear the silence" and immediately realized my faux pas. But Roy just laughed and said that is something which he often says to people "Isn't it nice and quiet" when exactly the opposite is happening around him.

Roy took great delight in showing off his whistle which Paul gave him. On the previous Rhodes trip Roy had said that he was going to buy them all whistles in case they got into trouble and needed his assistance! He has a great sense of humour, our Roy. Andrew was telling me that when Roy retired someone asked him what he was going to do with himself and he told them that he was going to learn to play a musical instrument! There were other "funnies" on that trip. Roy and I were going to fish one of the beats together and Andrew gave me the keys to his double cab. I asked Roy if he knew the way and when he said that he did, I gave him the keys. What I did not know was that on the previous trip he had almost burnt out the clutch on Paul's bakkie, because he cannot hear the car revving and tends to slip the clutch. Which is why Andrew had given me the keys. Roy did a great job, getting us there and back safe and sound.

On one occasion when we were fishing together, Roy made a point of using his whistle when I was just a short distance away and would have heard him if he had called. He enjoyed that moment. The problem was that when I needed to call him later, and he was about 50m ahead of me and was moving faster than my hobble, all I could do was hope that he would turn around. I decided to catch his attention by throwing a small stone into the water ahead of him, reckoning that the splash would catch his attention. My first throw fell a bit short and I picked up a slightly larger pebble but it was not a great throw and was heading straight for him. I shouted to warn him, which was obviously of no use at all, but fortunately it missed him by a small margin and the large splash made him jump, and certainly got his attention. After this I wracked my brains to think of some way to catch his attention whilst we are on the water. I was telling Andrew about this and that I thought an infra-red pointer could do the trick. Andrew was more worried that it would clear all the fish from the river. I still think that it is a good idea.

At the cottage, Roy asked me if I talked louder when I talked to him, because, as Andrew told me, apparently Jim talks very loud when he talks to Roy, which Roy found rather amusing. In fact I talk normally to him and sometimes mime the words, which I am not sure is a good thing.

As I mentioned earlier, Roy fishes with quite a large indicator and there was a time when he changed from a nymph to a dry fly, and kept the indicator on the leader. This puzzled me until Andrew explained that he sometimes does the same when he is fishing a very small dry which he finds difficult to follow on the water.

Although very obvious when thus explained, it was the first time that I had seen this.

Further fishing together was postponed because Roy had to have a hernia operation and was not sure how long the recuperation period was to be. He was taking some time to recuperate after the operation and needed to have further tests as things were "not right". Such was the character of the man that he delayed having the tests, because he wanted to attend the NFFC Gala Diner. Subsequently he has been diagnosed with cancer but is fighting this, and we all pray for his strength to win this fight. Maybe I am selfish, but I need to fish the Lower Riverside beat with you again Roy.

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