

## Fishing for Yellows on the Riet River

By Andrew Mather

### The Riet River – Part 1.

We arrived early on Monday morning at the Lilydale Rest Camp in the Motala Nature Reserve, just south of Kimberley.

This piece of river has been described as clean and pristine and more importantly teeming with Yellowfish. That would be the Large Mouth Yellowfish (*Labeobarbus kimberleyensis*), known locally as “Largies”, and Small Mouth Yellowfish (*Labeobarbus aeneus*), also called “Smalies”.



**Weapons at the ready (Photo: Peter Drake)**

The group headed down to the river for a quick look and decided to take a later lunch and fish a bit. One of the problems is accessing the water because of the reeds which line the banks. Lilydale has three fishing spots that one can access with a gate key. The fishing spots are between the game fence and the river.

The Riet River is somewhat of an anomaly in the Orange-Vaal river system as it is crystal clean. The river flows through a well-eroded streambed with quite a lot of rocky areas that create riffle sections and large pools. The river has quite a lot of weed that is in linear lines with open sections of flowing water in between.



**The Riet River (Photos: Andrew Mather)**



**Gavin "Cameo" Bester ready to go (left ) while Craig De Villiers kits up  
(Photos: Peter Drake)**

The group split up and headed in different directions. I headed straight across the floodplain which is completely packed with rocks, a bit like a moonscape. The rock were a little slippery with felt boots on but I knew I would need them for wading. Once at the river I started fishing. I fell into my clear trout stream mode and decided to fish a dry with a small nymph tied on New Zealand style. I focused on casting into the flowing clear water channels. After



several casts my elk hair caddis literally jumped 10cms sideways. Surprised and probably over come with the ferocious take, I raised my rod a little too quickly and the 4lb tippet parted.

I continued to fish up until a large cascading natural rock barrier. I later learnt this was referred to as the weir. Several large fish were seen cruising the channels but no amount of dangling a nymph in front of them would induce a take. I packed up and headed back to the cars. Reflecting back, the only take I had was when I got to the river. My guess was that they had seen me after that and they all got lockjaw. It's a dilemma, low clear conditions and big strong fish. Big flies were out as was thick tippet. Some of the lads fished 6x with some success but fishing was difficult.

We headed back to camp for the night and to strategize for the next day. The bungalows are clean and beds comfortable enough and Craig prepared us a great evening meal washed down with our tippie of choice.



**(Clockwise from top left) Rob and Peter having a sundowner, Sunset and Roan antelope (Photo: Gavin bester and Peter Drake).**

Next morning we headed out to the other fishing spot we were told about. This is down stream of the previous days spot and much more open with a long rocky kranz on the opposite bank. Again the group split up, most heading downstream while I opted to fish within sight of the parked cars. I spotted a small island in the river next to the main

channel that was just opposite the start of a large pool. I waded out to the island and surveyed the river. The same alternating weed and open water channels that I saw the previous day were there. But as these channels got to the pool the river was relatively weed free.



**The clean and pristine Riet River (Photo: Andrew Mather)**

I decided to persevere with my dry/dropper set up. A nice light cream elk hair and CDC caddis as a sighter with a nymph suspended below. I could see fish moving up the channels and circulating back into the pool. I couldn't see the full extent of the pool as the reeds hide the view of the pool.

I decided that casting directly at a fish in these clear conditions would spook them. So I decided to cast 5 or 6m upstream of the head of the pool in the flowing water channels and let the flies drift down into the head of the pool. It didn't take long to hook up. The fly had just drifted into the pool when bang...the dry disappeared and the rod went berserk. This first one I nursed a bit as I really wanted to be able to say I got a Riet River Yellow. This fish had other ideas. He ran upstream trying to lodge himself in the weeds. Evasive action was required which saw my 10' 4wt Orvis bend to a position that I was sure would break it. I managed to turn the fish downstream.

He now tried to run downstream through the pool. I cranked up the drag. This went on for several minutes and just when I thought I had him he headed into the weeds that I had been hiding behind for cover. He managed to tangle the tippet amongst the reeds. I was determined to land this fish so with no other option left I had to enter the river. Unfortunately for me the rock sloped away from me and my first step resulted in me slipping and falling properly into the river. Cold water has an effect on heightening the senses and I quickly got my act together and netted the



fish. The fish measured 18" and had given me a good run for my money. No wonder they are popular targets for anglers.



**My first Riet River Small Mouth Yellowfish (Photo: Andrew Mather)**

Speaking of commotion I could see Rob crossing the Riet about 80m upstream of me. As I was watching him he slipped and fell into a deep pool. He all but disappeared, all I could see was his Simms cap. Spluttering to the surface he almost managed to get out the water when he took another swim. He eventually got back on land and sat out in the sun for a while to dry out.

After all that commotion I decided to also dry out and let the pool rest. Any sensible fish had already gapped it. After about 15 minutes the yellows were once again cruising the channels. I once again cast upstream of the pool and let the current drift the flies down. This time the take was in the channel. The fish had clearly been holding in the weeds out of sight. This one took off through the weed bank and snapped me off.

I rested the pool again. Next cast the fly once again entered the pool and got taken. After a great tussle the yellow came to the net. I continued hooking fish and then resting the pool, only casting when the fish were cruising again.



**The Author with a beautiful Riet River “Smallie” (Photo: Craig De Villiers)**

One of my drifts did not induce a take so I let line out as the fly headed down to the pool. I had difficulty seeing the fly as the weeds I’d used to hide behind were so thick I had to lean out to see it. At about this time I realised my fly line had looped around the reel so I stopped to sort this out. I then started stripping back line so I could recast. Well something hit my fly...hard!. The fish then decided to turn around and head downstream. The reel started screaming and then the tippet popped. I wonder if it was a “largie” having seen a few cruising the river the day before. I guess I’ll never know.

I went on to hook 11 fish but only 7 made it to the net. What a day!. A very good reason enough to want to come back again.





Summing up, the Riet River is a fantastic destination for Yellow fish. The water clarity for one provides a different approach to fishing for yellows in this river. This is a technically challenging river to fish. Yellows are surprisingly clever, mostly outsmarting any anglers that aren't concealing themselves and using stealth to target these fish. Our experience as a group is that one won't catch large numbers of fish but each one caught will be very rewarding.



**(Left) Barry Wareham and the Author (Right) Keegan Kennedy and the Author discussing fly selection (Photos: Peter Drake)**