



## OF PLAGIARISM AND FAILING BACKING

NEWSLETTER - OCTOBER 2019



I really try hard to be original when writing this newsletter, but after reading Peter Coetzee's article in issue 14 of the cult magazine of fly fishing – The Mission, and experiencing this fish in the mystical environment of the Richtersveld, I just cannot help to jump on the bandwagon – Chasing Dragons it will be!!!

Like with every mythical story, there had to be some trials to overcome. First our new boats were a few days late from the manufacturer, and we still had to make the transoms and center consoles, with oarlocks. While Jacques was busy with that, I was attending to the

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packing list, and after long hours we finally were ready to hit the road a day before the first group would arrive. Really tight, but we left early on the Monday morning to do the 1000 km's to the Namibian border. As luck would have it, we got our first flat just outside Douglas, and decided to turn back to fix the spare. Just like checking your backing, we made a better decision than one of our clients did on the second trip, (more about this later). We had another 2 flats, and drove right through the night, only arriving at our accommodation in Namibia 05h00 the next morning. Quickly setting up camp, and after an hour's sleep, the first 2 clients arrived.



After meeting everyone in group 1, and a "lekker" meal, we hit the sack early that night. The next morning we set off to launch the boats, totally overpacked, it was a struggle to fit all the equipment on the packing boats, but we managed. The clients were having their fill nymphing the rapids at our launch venue. Well, before lunch all was locked and loaded, and we were making our way to camp 1. With all the rushing, we struggled to slow down, and skipped some very promising water. Luckily, we planned to stay 2 nights in camp 1. The following day Jacques went back to this stretch on foot with 2 of the 4 clients, and me and the other 2 fished the area downstream from camp. We were nymphing some of the deeper channels and game up with some beautifully bright yellow smallmouth yellows. Can you believe, both clients opened their accounts with some small ( sorry - we got into the habit to call fish of between 2 and 3 kg's "small" ) Largemouth Yellows. Later Jacques and his clients came back from upriver smiling. As they were exclusively targeting Largies, they managed 9 fish for the day. No Real Dragons though, with the biggest fish just under 4kg's.

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By that evening something else happened, and funny enough, this was not because the Dragon was slain! It was some other form of magic? The river and the desert started influencing the mood of everyone in camp. No cellphones ringing, being downriver from the more commercial stretch, no other voices. The pastilles of mountain and sky during sunset talks to the soul. And to deny a sense of a greater creative power, was impossible. I think this is how man was designed to live, even in a harsh environment like the Richtersveld, the beauty of the creation is all inspiring. By the next day we fell into the rhythm of the river, and with a sense of serenity, and a good pinch of excitement, the real hunt for the Dragon began.

This was our first time on this stretch of the river, and as we were lucky enough to have a group of clients that was happy going into the lesser known stretch of the river with us, there was much to learn. With hard work and great company the following 4 days flew past, and although the Dragon avoided us this round, all caught some nice fish. We were sad to say goodbye to a group of clients that did trips all over with us, and privileged to share this experience with them. We had to rush back to the South African side, to meet our next group, that would run the upper stretch with us. We launched the next day under Vioolsdrift.

This time we quickly settled, and having fished this stretch before, this time we had a plan. As part of this group of 6, natural selection placed some of the guys new to the sport, in my hands.

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As I really enjoy working with the less experienced fly fisherman among us, I was in my element. To see the lights go on over the 5 days on the river, after many of the hard lessons yellow virgins have to learn by braking off, losing flies and missing takes. I would like to believe I achieved my goal by the end of the trip. That is not just helping someone to catch a few fish, but transferring knowledge, and a passionate love for the quarry and the environment. With not to many old ideas in their heads, one can also get these guys to try some really off the wall stuff, with confidence, just because the guide suggested it. One of these moments proved to almost produce the first Dragon. While the rest of the group was settling down for sundowners in camp, I had Sean put a big heavy control fly on the nymph rig, and tied on one of my big still water Papa Roaches as a point fly, pulled him through a chest deep channel to a rock Island and made him drift this rig right up against the rocks. Just as I thought this was a bad idea, I heard a girl scream, and saw backing coming off Sean's 5 weight reel.

Another first for Sean – a guide screaming at a client – Let him run! Pull to the right! Keep him away from the rocks! Bend that rod! Reel, reel, reel! – and surviving the first run downstream, just to pass us and run almost the same distance upstream. The Dragon decided to turn right toward us, and no amount of screaming could get Sean to adapt fast enough to the onslaught.

He ended up right on his arse, with the fish creating it's own slack to spit the hook. Surviving the disappointment, we had great laughs around the campfire where the story was retold with all its necessary over exaggeration.

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Jacques took control of the Dragon Hunters. Dressed in full camo suit from Simms, a bikini clad invader, actually called him “sinister looking” (Invaders – groups from the lodges around Vioolsdrift passing us on their rafting trips. Although the river can handle lots of traffic, we probably felt the pinch of this small intrusions more personal than our clients after our first trip on the more secluded stretch downriver.)

Anyway – the hunt was on! Taking time out from casting the big rods, the guys did do a bit of nymphing here and there, but mostly they were committed Dragon hunters. Spending more time understanding this desert river, Jacques started to get them into largies, but still not Dragons. Some big smallies made a few hearts beat faster as they were taking big largie flies on 5/0 hooks. These big 4 to 5kg Small mouth Yellows is trophy fish in their own right and was amazing to see them eating these big flies.

And now we get to why it is important to check your backing when you go Dragon hunting. Jacques and Theo went back upriver to a place he saw a really big Dragon earlier that day. They rejoined the group about 3 hours later, with Theo still looking like he saw a ghost.

Now, Jacques is a fisherman, but coming to know him very well, if he says he has never seen anything like it, then you can start listening. The Dragon that took Theo’s fly stripped him into his backing in a matter of seconds, and before he could even start thinking about what happened, the backing snapped. Fish and fly line gone! 5 seconds flat!!!

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The following day, my merry nymphers caught Theo's fly line about 1km downstream. Now, I am not saying it is so, but I would like to mention, that if this fly line got to a point where it was not traveling in a straight line, I believe the line would have tangled around rocks, just as it did here where it got fished out. For some reason it travelled in a straight line for 1km?

In the crystal-clear water, Jacques had opportunities to see the fish behavior, when taking, and when refusing flies. He managed to get an amazing shot of a big Dragon just cruising, after refusing a blotted presentation, on the GoPro. By the end of the trip I could see the gears starting to kick in, in my partners fishing brain, and was looking foreword to our 5-day break between trips.

We planned to do a bit of fishing on our own. Our last group for this tour was happy to wait for venue selection until the last minute, and we decided to go and explore the lower stretch and test some of the theories and fly ideas we came up with during the first two trips. Just to show you we can be humble as well, during the first 2 trips there were some erratic barometer movement, that might have caused the fishing to be a bit slower than its potential.

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The night before our recce, Jacques tied up a few flies he was thinking of, and a few of the others we had in stock got a serious haircut. We only had 2 days to fish, and boy, was it a great one. Jacques landed his personal best Dragon, and I got one in the 4 to 5 kg range. Big Small mouths came to the net on regular intervals, and as the third group arrived, we were both in full hunting mode. We were ready to get these guys into some serious fish. We had a strategy and the right flies, and some practice fishing the techniques ourselves. Game on!!!



This was a long letter, so I am not going to share more fishing stories now, except for some stats. All 6 clients got their Dragon, and some more than one!!! And with Mike bringing home the Mother of Dragons, we are gearing up for a long season of hunting PAPA over the next few months. Please see our trip schedule hereafter, check your backing, and choose a date.

- **Couples Hosted package:** This is for two clients, one fisherman and one non-fisher. Minimum 5 couples. R21 500 per couple.
- **Trophy Guided Package :** Guided Large and Smallmouth trip. Maximum 6 anglers. R13 950 per angler.

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➔ **Packages include:** Professional guides, fully serviced camp with camp beds and mattresses for 5 nights, three meals per day, transfer from The Lodge to launch site, accommodation and meals at The Lodge.

➔ **Packages exclude:** Bedding, fishing gear, gratuities, alcoholic beverages, cold drinks and water.

<u>Arrival</u>	<u>Departure</u>	<u>Status</u>
23 February	28 February	Provisional Booking
1 March	7 March	Provisional Booking
<del>8 March</del>	<del>14 March</del>	<del>Booked</del>
<del>15 March</del>	<del>21 March</del>	<del>Booked</del>
<del>22 March</del>	<del>—28 March—</del>	<del>Booked</del>
29 March	4 April	Available
5 April	11 April	Provisional Booking
12 April	18 April	Available
30 August	5 September	Available
6 September	12 September	Available
13 September	19 September	Available
<del>20 September—</del>	<del>26 September—</del>	<del>Booked</del>
27 September	3 October	Available
<del>4 October</del>	<del>10 October</del>	<del>Booked</del>
<del>11 October</del>	<del>17 October</del>	<del>Booked</del>
<del>—18 October—</del>	<del>28 October</del>	<del>Booked</del>
1 November	7 November	Available

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8 November

14 November

Available

Best Regards,

Jacques and Etienne.



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