



**T**ogether with angling companion Darren Smit, I had been fishing for about 15 minutes. I had made a good cast onto the edge of a sandbank, right behind a submerged stump. The sandbank dropped off quickly and cut under an overhanging tree. The water simply looked too good not to hold a decent fish. Leaving the fly to sink behind the stump and drift off the sandbank, I managed no more than a handful of strips when my fly was met with a force I had never yet experienced in fresh water. At the same instant I was desperately trying to control the running line that was shooting off the deck. Once onto the reel, the fish sped across the lip of the sandbank before giving us a brief glimpse of its massive shoulders as it attempted to clear the water. In that moment the line went slack. In the futile hope that I was still connected, I began stripping as fast as I could. But it was not to be. I had just been taught a tough lesson by a fish of a magnitude I could hardly comprehend. The scene described above was the start of the finest day's fly fishing I have ever experienced – a day that inextricably shifted my fly fishing paradigm.

**AFRICA – A GIFT  
WAITING TO BE OPENED**

For a long time tigerfish has been my favourite fresh water target. Half of my year is spent chasing these fish on Africa's wild waterways with fly anglers from around the globe. As with all aspects of fly fishing, we are constantly pushing the boundaries: those set by our angling peers and adopted as the upper limits. In terms of fly fishing travel, it is easy for the unaware to fall into a limiting mind-set. Reading articles on habitat destruction, pollution in our waterways, overfishing and poor management practices, one can be forgiven for feeling despondent at times. Fortunately, Africa is one of the planet's most unexplored fly fishing continents. The relative lack of big industry and areas of political instability, combined with a thriving wildlife, photographic and hunting tourism industry have ensured that vast tracts of land have remained untouched. This is not to say that there are no threats to these areas, but with increasing awareness of the long-term economic viability of Africa's wilderness regions and the fisheries they support, we are in the pleasing position of being able to protect and nurture such environments.

Recently explored areas offering previously unheard-of African fly fishing opportunities include Gabon, Angola, the Seychelles and Mozambique. At the risk of sounding like a snob, we can thank our lucky stars that many of these parts have been discovered and introduced to the public by fly anglers – who, for the most part, have the long-term sustainability of these fisheries as their primary objective. Most significant developments in unique African fly fishing destinations relate to salt water venues. On the fresh water side, developments have taken place in the fields of yellowfish, tigerfish and (to a lesser degree) Nile perch fishing. When it comes to the wow factor, however, Africa's fresh water species have not received the same attention as their brethren from the brine. I believe that this is about to change, as we can now add East Africa to this list of top pedigree, world-class fly fishing venues.

Below: The author prospecting the rapids on the recce trip. Although the water was too high and discoloured to fish productively at that time, these waters hint at great potential later on in the season. Right: Recce trips involve a lot of uncertainty and logistical hiccups. Darren, suffering from a severe bout of malaria contracted prior to the trip, supervises a rudimentary river crossing.

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