

as highly anticipated and carefully planned which yielded suboptimal results, crept to the front of my mind, threatening to smother my enthusiasm. A loud thrashing sound brought me back to the present. Turning to my right I caught a glimpse of a vicious assault on some unsuspecting baitfish in the shallows – the unmistakable sight of tigers doing what they do best. My spirits lifted!

In no time we were offloading the 25hp outboard and fitting it onto the slender aluminium boat that was to be our exploration vessel for the next four days. As quickly as my spirits lifted, they plummeted again at the realisation that we were

missing the fuel line between the tank and the motor. With the light fading, the sat phones were brought out and plans made to get a new part. The ensuing days were mostly spent tying flies while listening to Darren, who had come down with a severe case of malaria, groaning from inside our rudimentary reed rondavel. On two afternoons I was poled on the boat to the nearby drop-off, and both times I caught fish in the 8lb - 11lb range. The birding was also superb, with narina trogons and palmnut vultures making a show. At last light and in the hour before sunrise each day I was taunted by the sounds of big tigerfish hunting on the sandbank, tortuously just out of reach.

Three days, numerous phone calls, more changes of plan and a plane, train, truck and man on a bike later, and the elusive fuel line arrived – on the morning of our last day! I have never felt pressure when fishing before, when guiding yes, but when personally fishing, never. But that morning, as we headed out at first light, I could almost taste the pressure. The two-month build-up and expense, finally arriving and then having to wait, all culminated in only eight hours on the water. Heading upstream I was stunned by the productive-looking waters, with large sandbanks, steep drop-offs and loads of fallen trees in the river, all indicating prime tigerfishing spots.

Below: A 23lb beaut – the stuff that dreams are made of. Three days' wait and missed opportunities were soon forgotten on landing this wonderful specimen. The excellent condition of this fish is an indication of the pristine nature of the fishery. With time on her side, a fish like this could break the 25lb, and possibly the 30lb, mark next season.

