



From the limited time I spent on the water the previous afternoon, I knew the fishing would not be easy. With the poor visibility we would have to place our flies almost on top of the fish. We were fishing #1/0 black Whistler-type flies put together with marabou, Krystal Flash and bucktail – a fly that made a good noise in the dirty water. It was 15 minutes into the first drift that I was decimated by the fish described in the opening paragraph, which was conservatively estimated at 25lb. On the same drift Darren almost fell overboard with fright as a fish of similar size, which had followed the frog pattern he was fishing, erupted from the water right next to the boat. Still in a state of awe, we regained some composure and began another drift. I was immediately picked up by a large fish which tore off downstream with such power that I wasn't sure if I wanted to be connected to it! I was thrilled, the adrenaline pumping through my body, heightening my senses to such a degree that the couple of seconds it lasted felt like minutes. The end was swift and painless – the last foot of running line agonisingly catching the rod butt. I was devastated. Under normal circumstances we are two pretty rational and (I'd like to think) proficient fly fishermen, but the two lost fish set the tone for the morning. I proceeded to lose three more fish before midday, all estimated at 10lb - 15lb.

At lunchtime we stopped at a small fishing camp – an operation run by three weathered men in the same way that their fathers and forefathers had before them. I was interested to see what they were catching and tried to glean some local knowledge from them. After quizzical looks at

Right: Applying the pressure in an attempt to land a 20lb-plus fish prior to drifting onto a pod of hippos.

Insert bottom: The accommodation – African reed rondavels.

Below: The author with a hefty 20lb tigerfish, one of two fish that broke the magical 20lb mark on his day's recce to the area.

our tackle, they told us not to fish on this day. Late rains in the catchments had resulted in a slight rise in water level (roughly 1cm, indicated by the gap between the cracked forefinger and thumb of the oldest). The rise in water, he explained, stopped the fish from “jumping.” Interestingly, the same conditions affect the upper and lower Zambezi and Okavango rivers. As we got back onto the water, the disappointment of losing two fish of a lifetime seemed to cut even deeper after the old man's words. Nonetheless, we had three hours left to make right the wrongs of the morning, so I was ready to fish like a man possessed.

THE HOLY GRAIL

Motoring downstream en route to a good-looking drift we had noticed earlier, our Tanzanian coxswain cut the motors. This spot, he said, would be a good area to fish due to the proximity of hippos. The exact location did not look too promising, other than the fact that we were on a big bend offering some depth and fast-flowing water. All

