The words "remote", "prospecting", "plenty fish", "never before" are usually uttered in secrecy, for they promise the nirvana we all search for. **Keith Clover** lifts the veil on one such venue.

Tiger Rush

Prospecting the Lungwebungu River

Under African skies with "Spottie" doing its thing on the fire – what better way to relax after an exciting day.

The six-seater Cessna bucked and rolled as we flew over the vast dry scrub of western Zambia. A myriad aluminium rod tubes caged me in, as though in some air-bound prison. The single engine was screaming in protest at us anglers and our excess baggage that had been crammed into her aluminium bowls. Keeping a keen eye on the dials (urging all of the needles to remain in the green), I began to feel slightly guilty. Although I had made a somewhat futile gesture of compliance by leaving a Checkers packet of clothing and some bulky rod tubes at the airport, I was significantly over my 12kg baggage limit. Did I really need dumbbell eyes in 3mm and 5mm? Would the extra bobbin of lead prove to be the straw the broke the camel's back? It was a risk I was willing to take. After all, how often do you get the opportunity to prospect a remote river, its inhabitants never before subjected to the sting of fur and feathers? The answer is painfully simple – in this day and age, not very often.

In 2005 Gavin Johnston, owner of Mutemwa Lodge, first set up a fly camp (a seasonal camp erected and taken down each year) on the Lungwebungu River, which is a tributary of the Zambezi. The two rivers meet above the Barotse floodplains, roughly 500km upriver from Katima Mulilo, near the missionary village of Lukulu. This fly camp is undoubtedly one of the most remote fishing camps in Africa. It offers hard-core anglers the opportunity to target trophy tigerfish and bream in a remote environment untouched by recreational fishermen. In 2005 Gavin hosted a couple of conventional anglers, with exceptional results. Due to the birth of his third daughter, the camp was never erected in 2006, but it was with great excitement that Gavin opened for business for a month in July 2007. I formed part of a group of five anglers fortunate enough to explore the fly fishing potential of this uncharted fishery.

THE FISHERY

The Lungwebungu River is a winter fishery – this a function of accessibility, practicality and prime fishing dates. Due to the surrounding floodplains, the dynamics of the system are very similar to those of areas such as the Caprivi and Barotse floodplains – the best fishing is to be had when the flood waters recede off the surrounding plains, flushing the system with recently spawned baitfish. This process occurs earlier (compared to the Caprivi region) on the Lungwebungu River due to the closer proximity of this river to its catchments; hence less lag between the annual rains and flooding. Although we were heading up late in the season in relation to the waters actively flowing off the plains into the main channel, I was positive that the visit would give us a good indication of the fishery's potential.

On arriving at the airstrip in Lukulu we were met by Gavin and his family, and after crossing the Zambezi on a prehistoric ferry seemingly held together with a mismatch of car, truck, boat and tractor parts, we began the 4x4 transfer to our waiting camp, a cosy logfire and a good meal. The next morning, rising with the sun, fresh Zambian coffee (poured from "Spottie" the cowboy-style percolator gurgling on the previous night's fire) was enjoyed by all as we rigged tackle in the soft morning light. Tinges of excitement, nervousness and anticipation were evident – emotions one cannot hide when about to fish virgin waters. Prospecting the Lungwebungu was near. It was late July